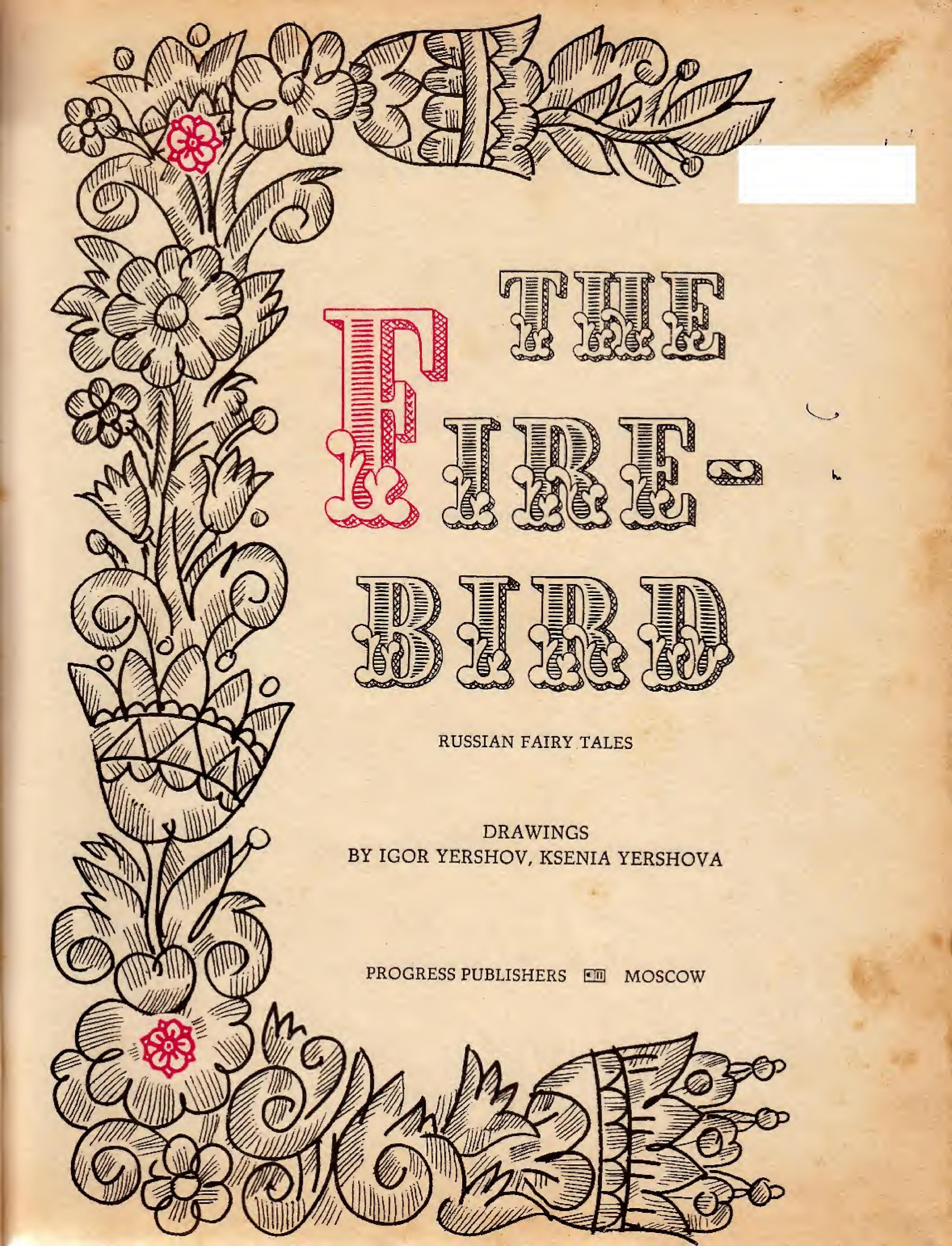




# THE FIRE-BIRD



# THE TRE BIRD

RUSSIAN FAIRY TALES

DRAWINGS  
BY IGOR YERSHOV, KSEНИЯ YERSHOVA

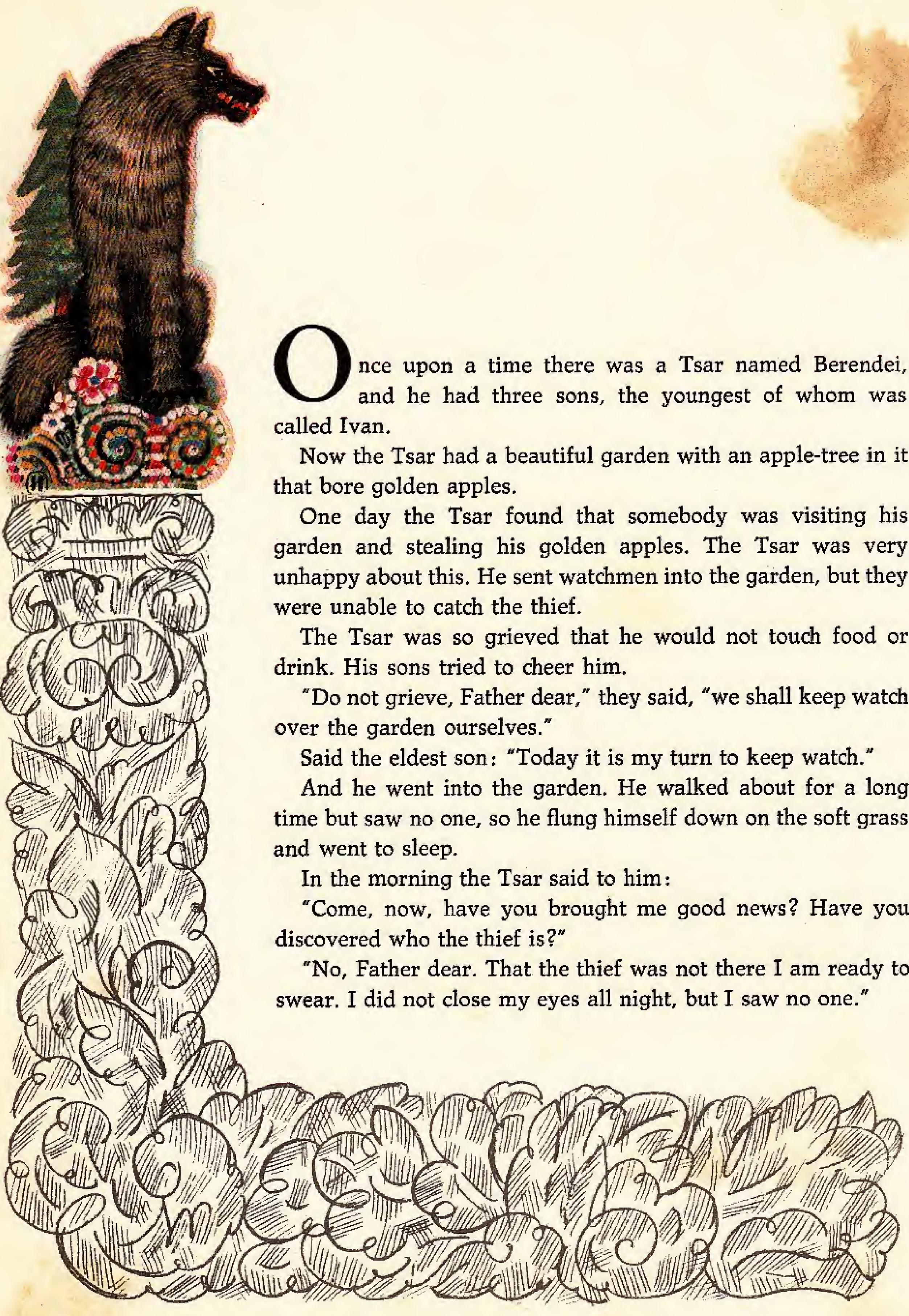
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**THE FIRE-BIRD**



**O**nce upon a time there was a Tsar named Berendei, and he had three sons, the youngest of whom was called Ivan.

Now the Tsar had a beautiful garden with an apple-tree in it that bore golden apples.

One day the Tsar found that somebody was visiting his garden and stealing his golden apples. The Tsar was very unhappy about this. He sent watchmen into the garden, but they were unable to catch the thief.

The Tsar was so grieved that he would not touch food or drink. His sons tried to cheer him.

"Do not grieve, Father dear," they said, "we shall keep watch over the garden ourselves."

Said the eldest son: "Today it is my turn to keep watch."

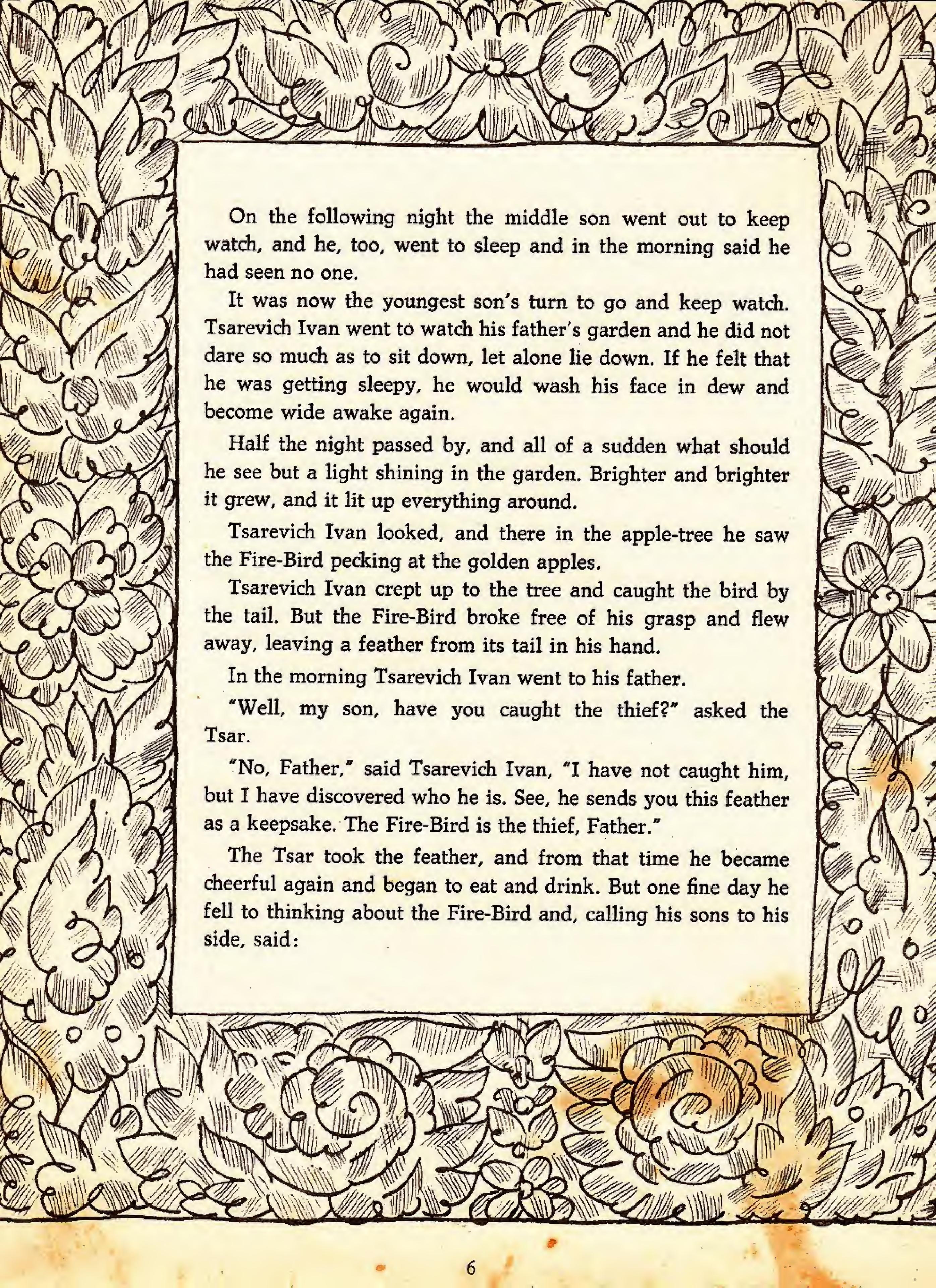
And he went into the garden. He walked about for a long time but saw no one, so he flung himself down on the soft grass and went to sleep.

In the morning the Tsar said to him:

"Come, now, have you brought me good news? Have you discovered who the thief is?"

"No, Father dear. That the thief was not there I am ready to swear. I did not close my eyes all night, but I saw no one."





On the following night the middle son went out to keep watch, and he, too, went to sleep and in the morning said he had seen no one.

It was now the youngest son's turn to go and keep watch. Tsarevich Ivan went to watch his father's garden and he did not dare so much as to sit down, let alone lie down. If he felt that he was getting sleepy, he would wash his face in dew and become wide awake again.

Half the night passed by, and all of a sudden what should he see but a light shining in the garden. Brighter and brighter it grew, and it lit up everything around.

Tsarevich Ivan looked, and there in the apple-tree he saw the Fire-Bird pecking at the golden apples.

Tsarevich Ivan crept up to the tree and caught the bird by the tail. But the Fire-Bird broke free of his grasp and flew away, leaving a feather from its tail in his hand.

In the morning Tsarevich Ivan went to his father.

"Well, my son, have you caught the thief?" asked the Tsar.

"No, Father," said Tsarevich Ivan, "I have not caught him, but I have discovered who he is. See, he sends you this feather as a keepsake. The Fire-Bird is the thief, Father."

The Tsar took the feather, and from that time he became cheerful again and began to eat and drink. But one fine day he fell to thinking about the Fire-Bird and, calling his sons to his side, said:

"My dear sons, I would have you saddle your trusty steeds and set out to see the wide world. If you search in all its far corners, perhaps you will come upon the Fire-Bird."

The sons bowed to their father, saddled their trusty steeds and set out. The eldest son took one road, the middle son another, and Tsarevich Ivan a third.

Whether Tsarevich Ivan was long on the way or not, no one can say, but one day, it being summer and very warm, he felt so tired that he got off his horse and, binding its feet so that it could not go very far, lay down to rest.

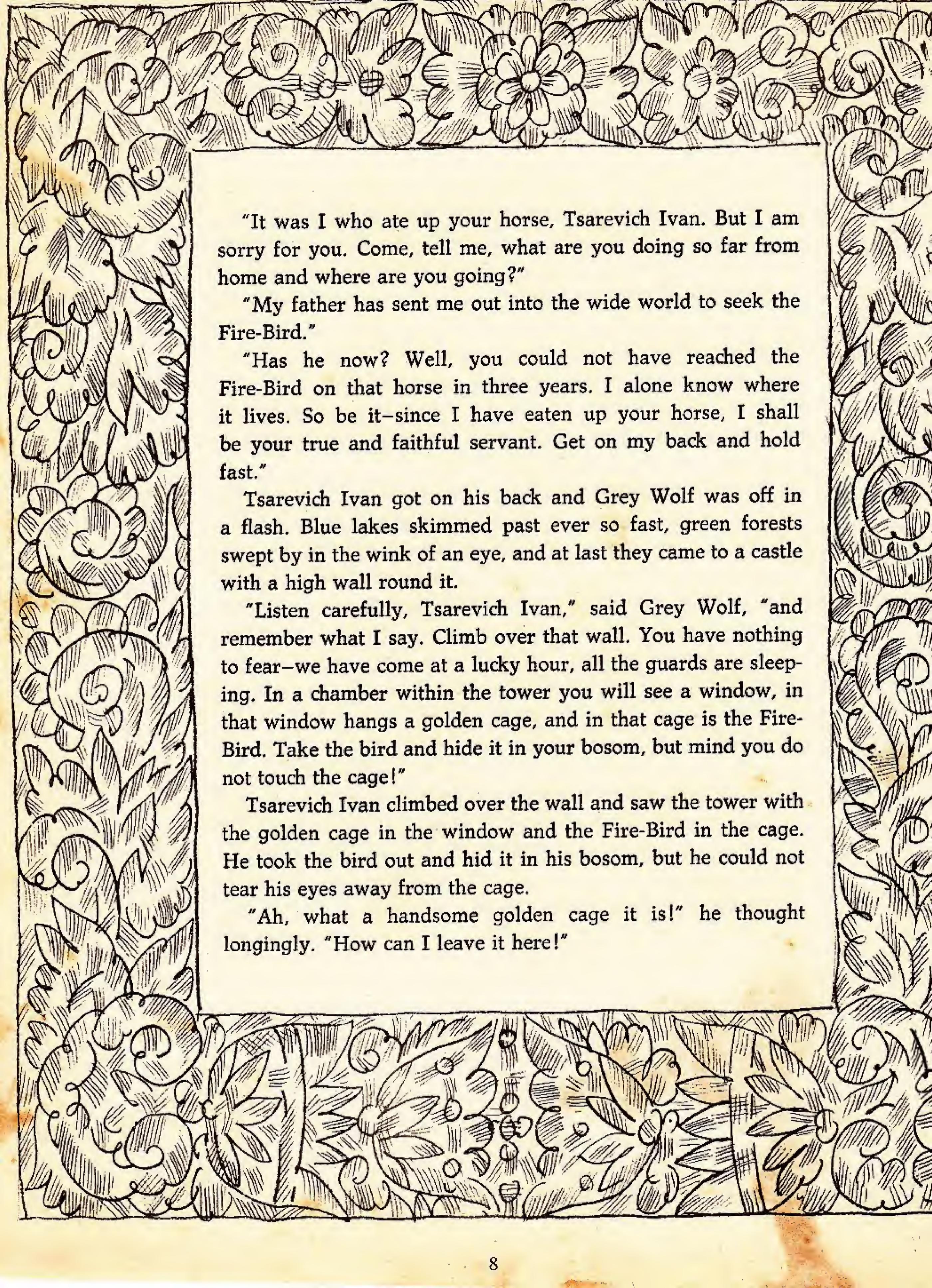
Whether he slept for a long time or a little time nobody knows, but when he woke up he found that his horse was gone. He went to look for it, he walked and he walked, and at last he found its remains: nothing but bones, picked clean. Tsarevich Ivan was greatly grieved. How could he continue on his journey without a horse?

"Ah, well," he thought, "it cannot be helped, and I must make the best of it."

And he went on on foot. He walked and walked till he was so tired that he was ready to drop. He sat down on the soft grass, and he was very sad and woebegone. Suddenly, lo and behold! who should come running up to him but Grey Wolf.

"Why are you sitting here so sad and sorrowful, Tsarevich Ivan?" asked Grey Wolf.

"How can I help being sad, Grey Wolf! I have lost my trusty steed."



"It was I who ate up your horse, Tsarevich Ivan. But I am sorry for you. Come, tell me, what are you doing so far from home and where are you going?"

"My father has sent me out into the wide world to seek the Fire-Bird."

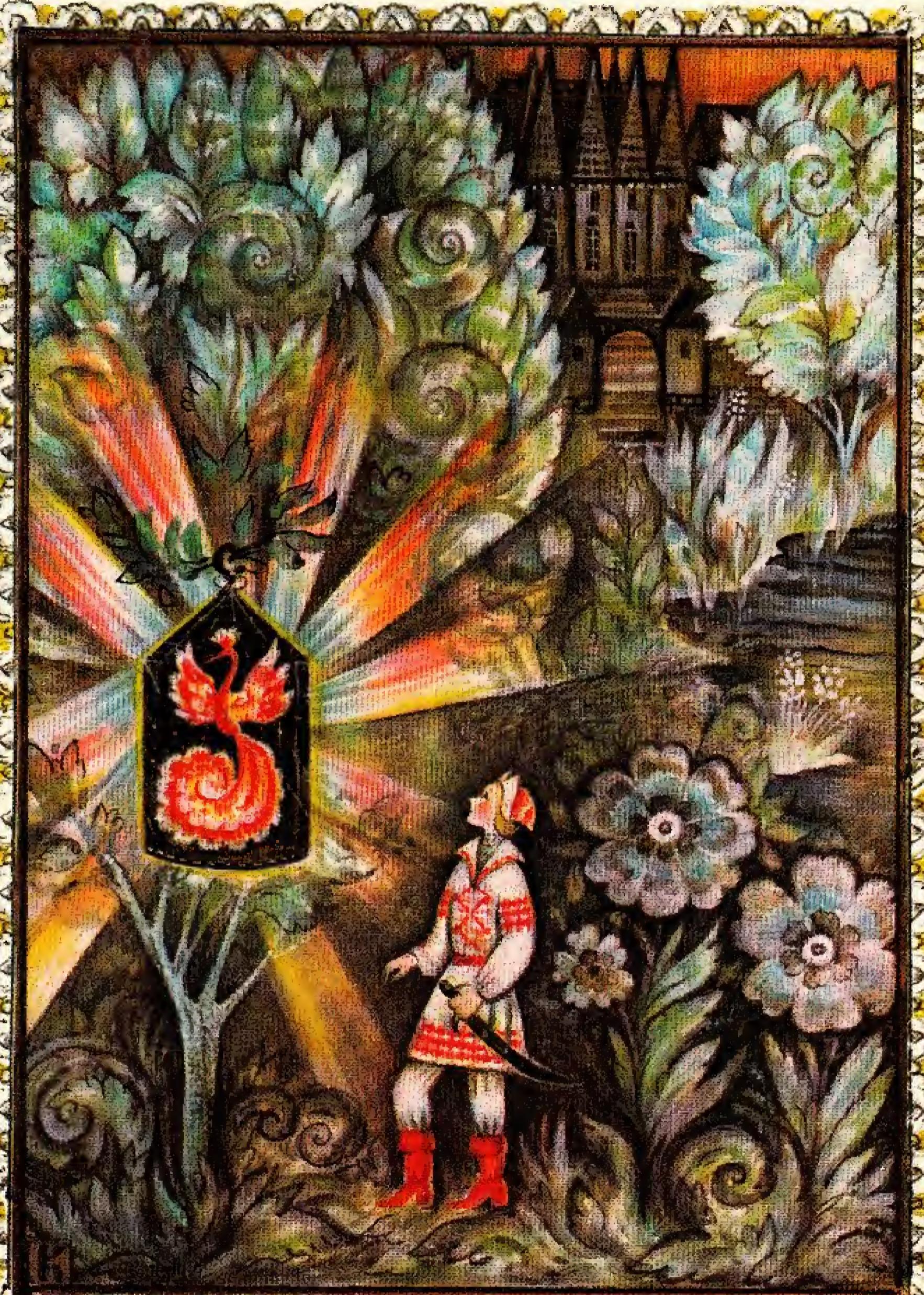
"Has he now? Well, you could not have reached the Fire-Bird on that horse in three years. I alone know where it lives. So be it—since I have eaten up your horse, I shall be your true and faithful servant. Get on my back and hold fast."

Tsarevich Ivan got on his back and Grey Wolf was off in a flash. Blue lakes skimmed past ever so fast, green forests swept by in the wink of an eye, and at last they came to a castle with a high wall round it.

"Listen carefully, Tsarevich Ivan," said Grey Wolf, "and remember what I say. Climb over that wall. You have nothing to fear—we have come at a lucky hour, all the guards are sleeping. In a chamber within the tower you will see a window, in that window hangs a golden cage, and in that cage is the Fire-Bird. Take the bird and hide it in your bosom, but mind you do not touch the cage!"

Tsarevich Ivan climbed over the wall and saw the tower with the golden cage in the window and the Fire-Bird in the cage. He took the bird out and hid it in his bosom, but he could not tear his eyes away from the cage.

"Ah, what a handsome golden cage it is!" he thought longingly. "How can I leave it here!"



And he forgot all about the Wolf's warning. But the moment he touched the cage, a hue and cry arose within the castle—trumpets began to blow, drums began to beat, and the guards woke up, seized Tsarevich Ivan and marched him off to Tsar Afron.

"Who are you and whence do you hail?" Tsar Afron demanded angrily.

"I am Tsarevich Ivan, son of Tsar Berendei."

"Fie, shame on you! To think of the son of a tsar being a thief!"

"Well, you should not have let your bird steal apples from our garden."

"If you had come and told me about it in an honest way, I would have made you a present of the Bird out of respect for your father, Tsar Berendei. But now I shall spread the ill fame of your family far and wide. Or no—perhaps I will not, after all. If you do what I tell you, I shall forgive you. In a certain tsardom there is a Tsar named Kusman and he has a Horse with a Golden Mane. Bring me that Horse and I will make you a gift of the Fire-Bird and the cage besides."

Tsarevich Ivan felt very sad and crestfallen, and he went back to Grey Wolf.

"I told you not to touch the cage," said the Wolf. "Why did you not heed my warning?"

"I am sorry, Grey Wolf, please forgive me."

"You are sorry, are you? Oh, well, get on my back again.

I gave my word, and I must not go back on it. A truth that all good folk accept is that a promise must be kept."

And off went Grey Wolf with Tsarevich Ivan on his back. Whether they travelled for a long or a little time nobody knows, but at last they came to the castle where the Horse with the Golden Mane was kept.

"Climb over the wall, Tsarevich Ivan, the guards are asleep," said Grey Wolf. "Go to the stable and take the Horse, but mind you do not touch the bridle."

Tsarevich Ivan climbed over the castle wall and, all the guards being asleep, he went to the stable and caught Golden Mane. But he could not help picking up the bridle—it was made of gold and set with precious stones—a fitting bridle for such a horse.

No sooner had Tsarevich Ivan touched the bridle than a hue and cry was raised within the castle. Trumpets began to blow, drums began to beat, and the guards woke up, seized Tsarevich Ivan and marched him off to Tsar Kusman.

"Who are you and whence do you hail?" the Tsar demanded.

"I am Tsarevich Ivan."

"A tsar's son stealing horses! What a foolish thing to do! A common peasant would not stoop to it. But I shall forgive you, Tsarevich Ivan, if you do what I tell you. Tsar Dalmat has a daughter named Yelena the Fair. Steal her and bring her to me, and I shall make you a present of my Horse with the Golden Mane and of the bridle besides."

Tsarevich Ivan felt more sad and crestfallen than ever, and he went back to Grey Wolf.

"I told you not to touch the bridle, Tsarevich Ivan!" said the Wolf. "Why did you not heed my warning?"

"I am sorry, Grey Wolf, please forgive me."

"Being sorry won't do much good. Oh, well, get on my back again."

And off went Grey Wolf with Tsarevich Ivan. By and by they came to the tsardom of Tsar Dalmat, and in the garden of his castle Yelena the Fair was strolling with her women and maids.

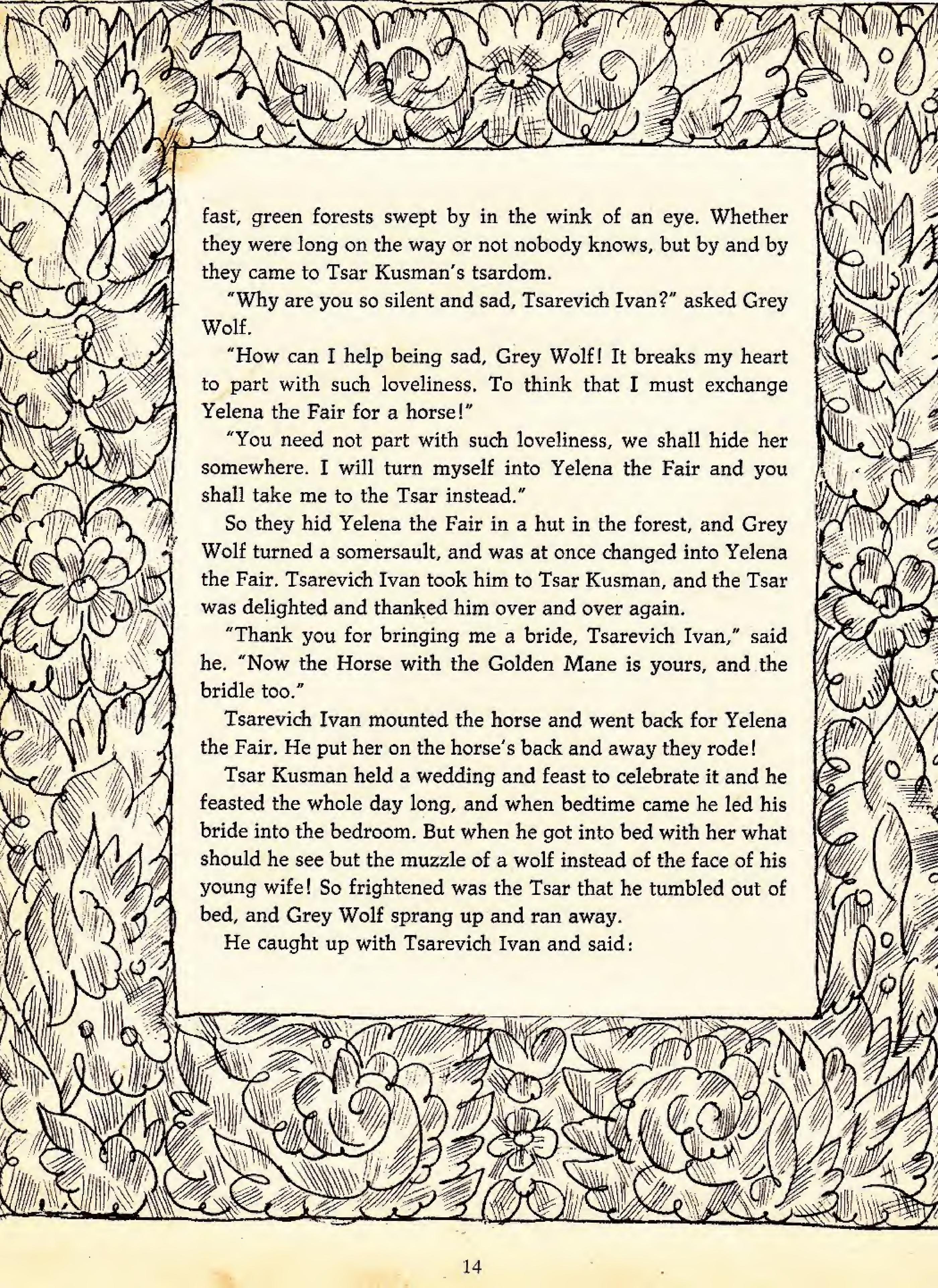
"This time I shall do everything myself," said Grey Wolf. "You go back the way we came and I will soon catch up with you."

So Tsarevich Ivan went back the way he had come, and Grey Wolf jumped over the wall into the garden. He crouched behind a bush and peeped out, and there was Yelena the Fair strolling about with all her women and maids. After a time she fell behind them, and Grey Wolf at once seized her, tossed her across his back, jumped over the wall and took to his heels.

Tsarevich Ivan was walking back the way he had come, when all of a sudden his heart leapt with joy, for there was Grey Wolf with Yelena the Fair on his back! "You get on my back too, and be quick about it, or they may catch us," said Grey Wolf.

Grey Wolf sped down the path with Tsarevich Ivan and Yelena the Fair on his back. Blue lakes skimmed past ever so





fast, green forests swept by in the wink of an eye. Whether they were long on the way or not nobody knows, but by and by they came to Tsar Kusman's tsardom.

"Why are you so silent and sad, Tsarevich Ivan?" asked Grey Wolf.

"How can I help being sad, Grey Wolf! It breaks my heart to part with such loveliness. To think that I must exchange Yelena the Fair for a horse!"

"You need not part with such loveliness, we shall hide her somewhere. I will turn myself into Yelena the Fair and you shall take me to the Tsar instead."

So they hid Yelena the Fair in a hut in the forest, and Grey Wolf turned a somersault, and was at once changed into Yelena the Fair. Tsarevich Ivan took him to Tsar Kusman, and the Tsar was delighted and thanked him over and over again.

"Thank you for bringing me a bride, Tsarevich Ivan," said he. "Now the Horse with the Golden Mane is yours, and the bridle too."

Tsarevich Ivan mounted the horse and went back for Yelena the Fair. He put her on the horse's back and away they rode!

Tsar Kusman held a wedding and feast to celebrate it and he feasted the whole day long, and when bedtime came he led his bride into the bedroom. But when he got into bed with her what should he see but the muzzle of a wolf instead of the face of his young wife! So frightened was the Tsar that he tumbled out of bed, and Grey Wolf sprang up and ran away.

He caught up with Tsarevich Ivan and said:

"Why are you sad, Tsarevich Ivan?"

"How can I help being sad! I cannot bear to think of exchanging the Horse with the Golden Mane for the Fire-Bird."

"Cheer up, I will help you," said the Wolf.

Soon they came to the tsardom of Tsar Afron.

"Hide the horse and Yelena the Fair," said the Wolf. "I will turn myself into Golden Mane and you shall take me to Tsar Afron."

So they hid Yelena the Fair and Golden Mane in the woods, and Grey Wolf turned a somersault and was changed into Golden Mane. Tsarevich Ivan led him off to Tsar Afron, and the Tsar was delighted and gave him the Fire-Bird and the golden cage too.

Tsarevich Ivan went back to the woods, put Yelena the Fair on Golden Mane's back and, taking the golden cage with the Fire-Bird in it, set off homewards.

Meanwhile Tsar Afron had the gift horse brought to him, and he was just about to get on its back when it turned into a grey wolf. So frightened was the Tsar that he fell down where he stood, and Grey Wolf ran away and soon caught up with Tsarevich Ivan.

"And now I must say good-bye," said he, "for I can go no farther."

Tsarevich Ivan got off the horse, bowed low three times, and thanked Grey Wolf humbly.

"Do not say good-bye for good, for you may still have need of me," said Grey Wolf.

"Why should I need him again?" thought Tsarevich Ivan.  
"All my wishes have been fulfilled."

He got on Golden Mane's back and rode on with Yelena the Fair and the Fire-Bird. By and by they reached his own native land, and Tsarevich Ivan decided to stop for a bite to eat. He had a little bread with him, so they ate the bread and drank fresh water from the spring, and then lay down to rest.

No sooner had Tsarevich Ivan fallen asleep than his brothers came riding up. They had been to other lands in search of the Fire-Bird, and were now coming home empty-handed.

When they saw that Tsarevich Ivan had got everything they said:

"Let us kill our brother Ivan, for then all his spoils will be ours."

And with that they killed Tsarevich Ivan. Then they got on Golden Mane's back, took the Fire-Bird, seated Yelena the Fair on a horse and said:

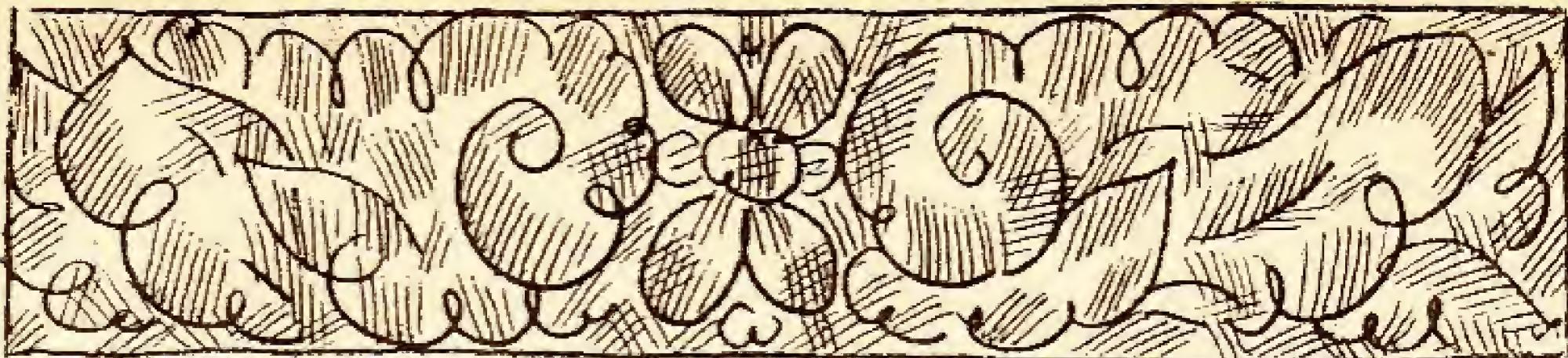
"See that you say not a word about this at home!"

So there lay Tsarevich Ivan on the ground, with the ravens circling over his head. All of a sudden who should come running but Grey Wolf. He ran up and he seized a raven and her fledgling.

"Fly and fetch me dead and living water, Raven," said the Wolf. "If you do, I shall let your nestling go."

The Raven flew off—what else could she do?—while the Wolf held her fledgling. Whether a long time passed by or a little time nobody knows, but at last she came back with the dead





and living water. Grey Wolf sprinkled the dead water on Tsarevich Ivan's wounds, and the wounds healed. Then he sprinkled him with the living water, and Tsarevich Ivan came back to life.

"Oh, how soundly I slept!" said he.

"Aye," said Grey Wolf, "and but for me you would never have wakened. Your own brothers killed you and took away all your treasures. Get on my back, quick."

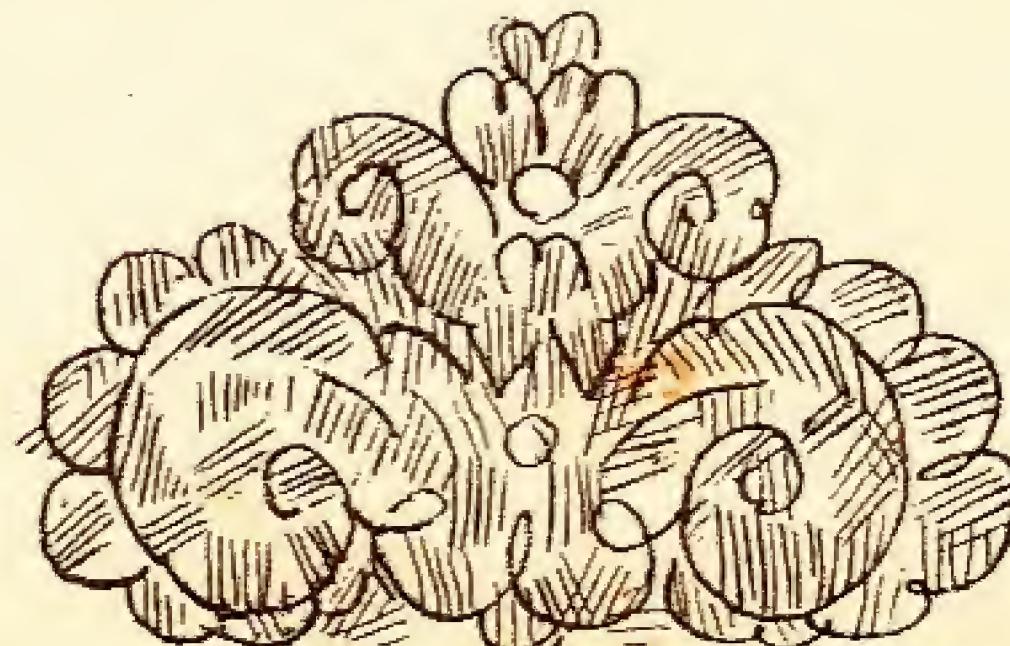
They went off in hot pursuit, and they soon caught up the two brothers, and Grey Wolf tore them to bits and scattered the bits over the field.

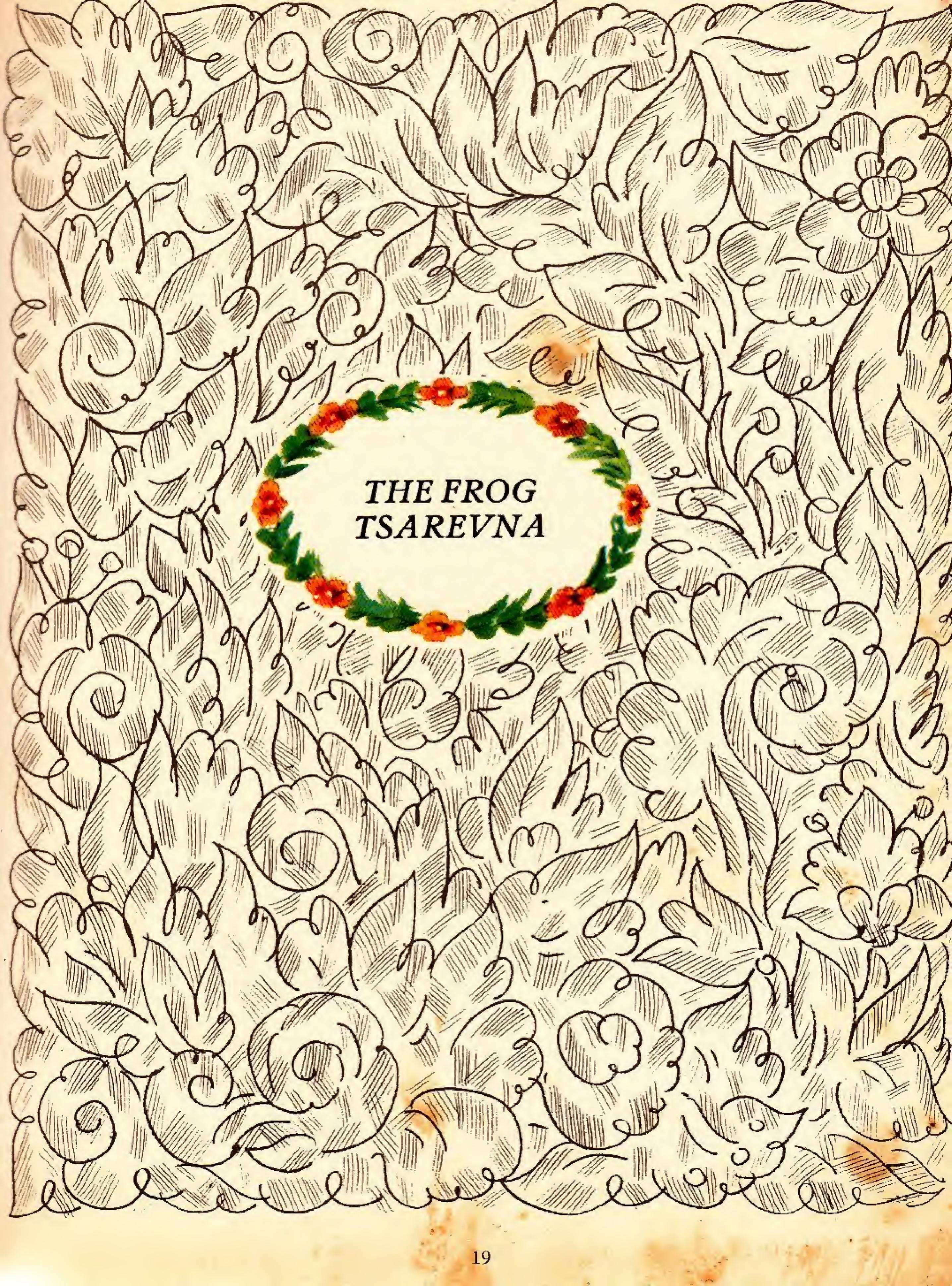
Tsarevich Ivan bowed to Grey Wolf and took leave of him for good.

He rode home on the Horse with the Golden Mane, and he brought his father the Fire-Bird and himself a bride—Yelena the Fair.

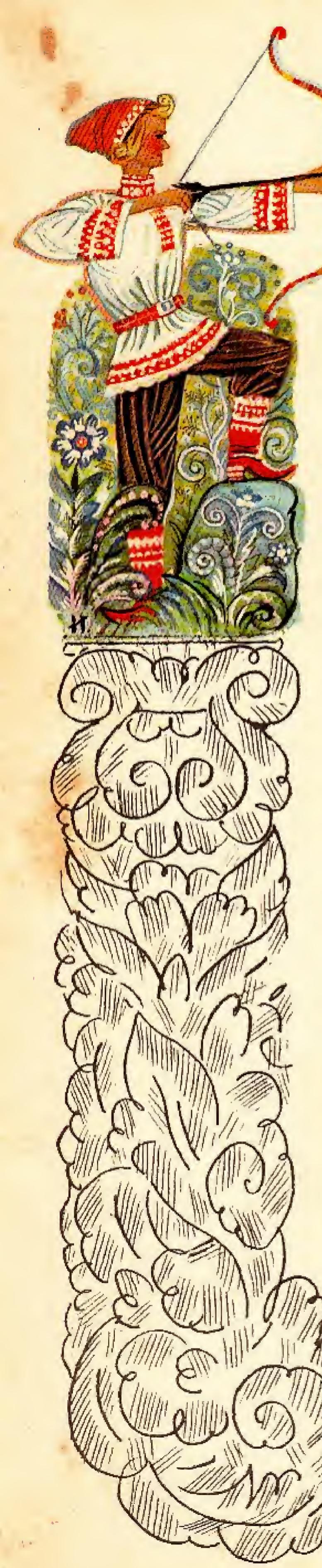
Tsar Berendei was overjoyed and asked his son all about everything. Tsarevich Ivan told him how Grey Wolf had helped him, and how his brothers had killed him while he slept and Grey Wolf had torn them to bits.

At first Tsar Berendei was sorely grieved, but he soon got over it. And Tsarevich Ivan married Yelena the Fair and they lived together in health and cheer for many a long and prosperous year.





**THE FROG  
TSAREVNA**



**L**ong, long ago there was a Tsar who had three sons. One day, when his sons were grown to manhood, the Tsar called them to him and said: "My dear sons, while yet I am not old I should like to see you married and to rejoice in the sight of your children and my grandchildren."

And the sons replied:

"If that is your wish, Father, then give us your blessing. Who would you like us to marry?"

"Now then, my sons, you must each of you take an arrow and go out into the open field. You must shoot the arrows, and wherever they fall, there will you find your destined brides."

The sons bowed to their father and, each of them taking an arrow, went out into the open field. There they drew their bows and let fly their arrows.

The eldest son's arrow fell in a boyar's courtyard and was picked up by the boyar's daughter. The middle son's arrow fell in a rich merchant's yard and was picked up by the merchant's daughter. And as for the youngest son, Tsarevich Ivan, his arrow shot up and flew away he knew not where. He went in search of it and he walked on and on till he reached a marsh, and what did he see sitting there but a Frog with the arrow in its mouth. Said Tsarevich Ivan to the Frog:



"Frog, Frog, give me back my arrow."

But the Frog replied:

"I will if you marry me!"

"What do you mean, how can I marry a frog?"

"You must, for I am your destined bride."

Tsarevich Ivan felt sad and crestfallen. But there was nothing to be done, and he picked up the Frog and carried it home.

Three weddings were celebrated: his eldest son the Tsar married to the boyar's daughter, his middle son, to the merchant's daughter, and poor Tsarevich Ivan, to the Frog.

Some little time passed, and the Tsar called his sons to his side.

"I want to see which of your wives is the better needlewoman," said he. "Let them each make me a shirt by tomorrow morning."

The sons bowed to their father and left him.

Tsarevich Ivan came home, sat down and hung his head. And the Frog hopped over the floor and up to him and asked:

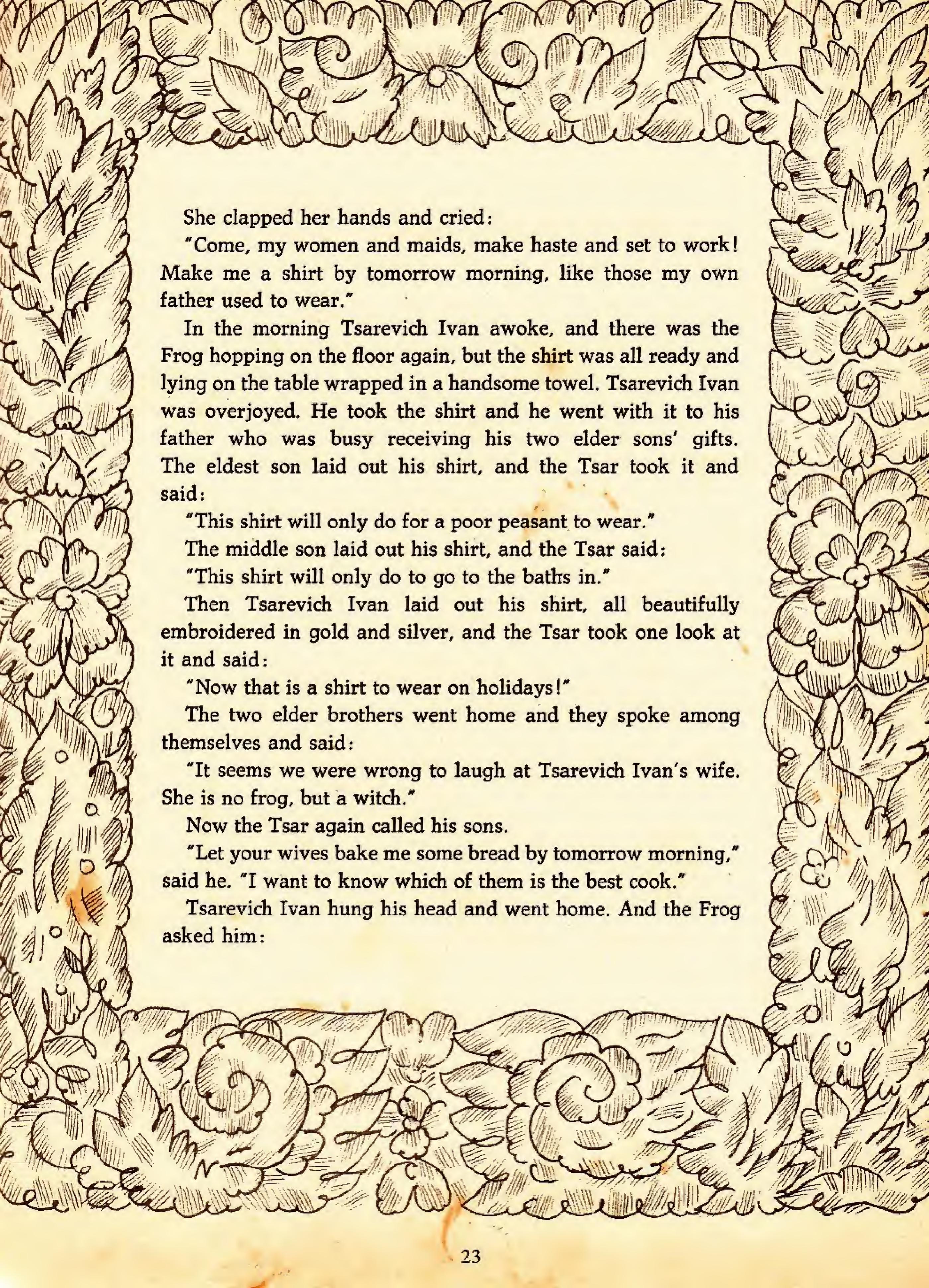
"Why do you hang your head, Tsarevich Ivan? What is it that troubles you?"

"Father bids you make him a shirt by tomorrow morning."

Said the Frog:

"Do not grieve, Tsarevich Ivan, but go to bed, for morning is wiser than evening."

Tsarevich Ivan went to bed, and the Frog hopped out on to the porch, cast off its frog skin and turned into Vasilisa the Wise and Clever, a maiden fair beyond compare.



She clapped her hands and cried:  
"Come, my women and maids, make haste and set to work!  
Make me a shirt by tomorrow morning, like those my own  
father used to wear."

In the morning Tsarevich Ivan awoke, and there was the Frog hopping on the floor again, but the shirt was all ready and lying on the table wrapped in a handsome towel. Tsarevich Ivan was overjoyed. He took the shirt and he went with it to his father who was busy receiving his two elder sons' gifts. The eldest son laid out his shirt, and the Tsar took it and said:

"This shirt will only do for a poor peasant to wear."

The middle son laid out his shirt, and the Tsar said:

"This shirt will only do to go to the baths in."

Then Tsarevich Ivan laid out his shirt, all beautifully embroidered in gold and silver, and the Tsar took one look at it and said:

"Now that is a shirt to wear on holidays!"

The two elder brothers went home and they spoke among themselves and said:

"It seems we were wrong to laugh at Tsarevich Ivan's wife.  
She is no frog, but a witch."

Now the Tsar again called his sons.

"Let your wives bake me some bread by tomorrow morning,"  
said he. "I want to know which of them is the best cook."

Tsarevich Ivan hung his head and went home. And the Frog asked him:

"Why are you so sad, Tsarevich Ivan?"

Said Tsarevich Ivan:

"You are to bake some bread for my father by tomorrow morning."

"Do not grieve, Tsarevich Ivan, but go to bed. Morning is wiser than evening."

And her two sisters-in-law, who had laughed at the Frog at first, now sent an old woman who worked in the kitchen to see how she baked her bread.

But the Frog was clever and guessed what they were up to. She kneaded some dough, broke off the top of the stove and threw the dough down the hole. The old woman ran to the two sisters-in-law and told them all about it, and they did as the Frog had done.

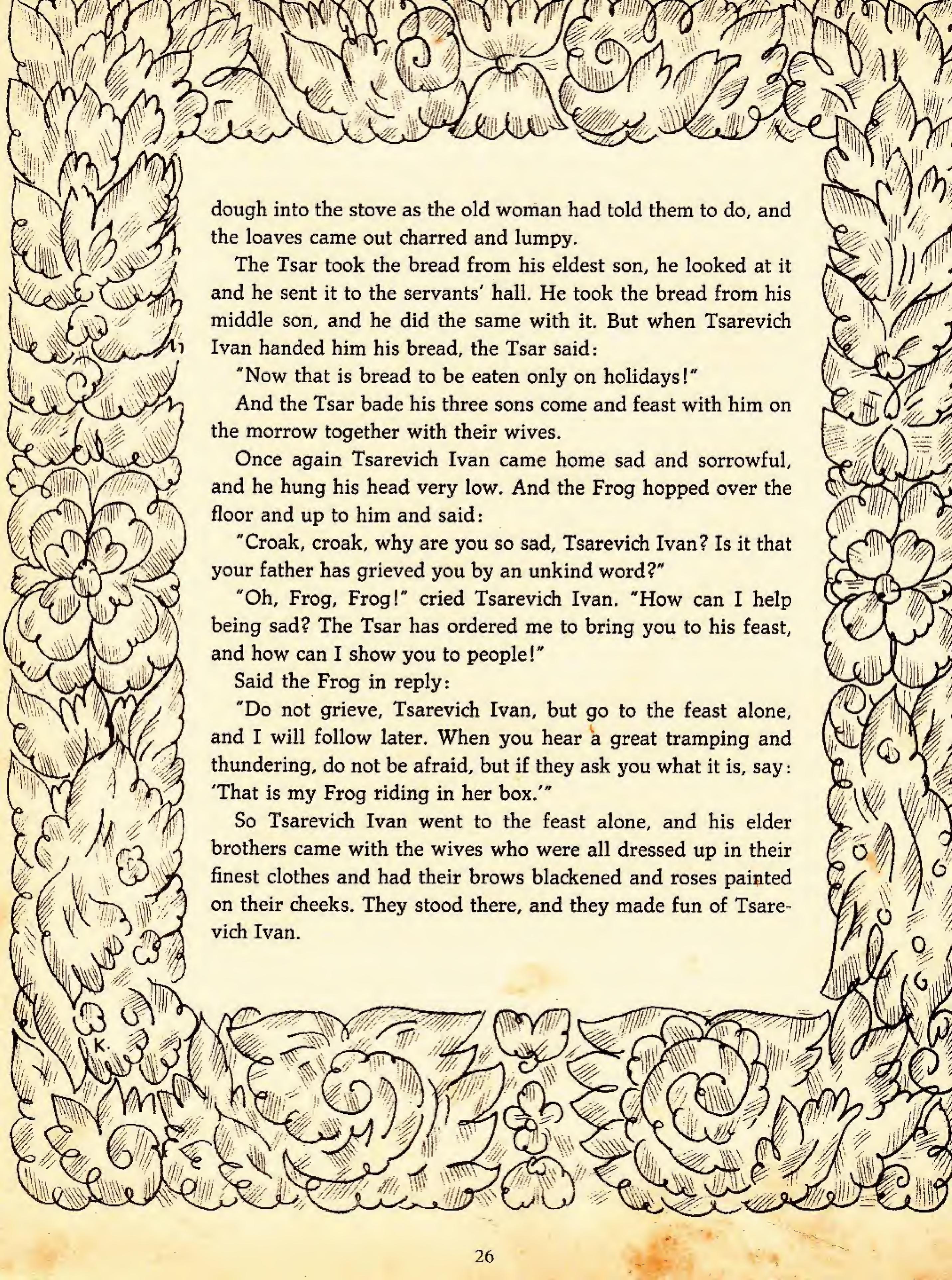
And the Frog hopped out on to the porch, turned into Vasilisa the Wise and Clever and clapped her hands.

"Come, my women and maids, make haste and set to work!" cried she. "By tomorrow morning bake me some soft white bread, the kind I used to eat at my own father's house."

In the morning Tsarevich Ivan woke up, and there was the bread all ready, lying on the table and prettily decorated with all manner of things: stamped figures on the sides and towns with walls and gates on the top.

Tsarevich Ivan was overjoyed. He wrapped up the bread in a towel and took it to his father who was just receiving the loaves his elder sons had brought. Their wives had dropped the





dough into the stove as the old woman had told them to do, and the loaves came out charred and lumpy.

The Tsar took the bread from his eldest son, he looked at it and he sent it to the servants' hall. He took the bread from his middle son, and he did the same with it. But when Tsarevich Ivan handed him his bread, the Tsar said:

"Now that is bread to be eaten only on holidays!"

And the Tsar bade his three sons come and feast with him on the morrow together with their wives.

Once again Tsarevich Ivan came home sad and sorrowful, and he hung his head very low. And the Frog hopped over the floor and up to him and said:

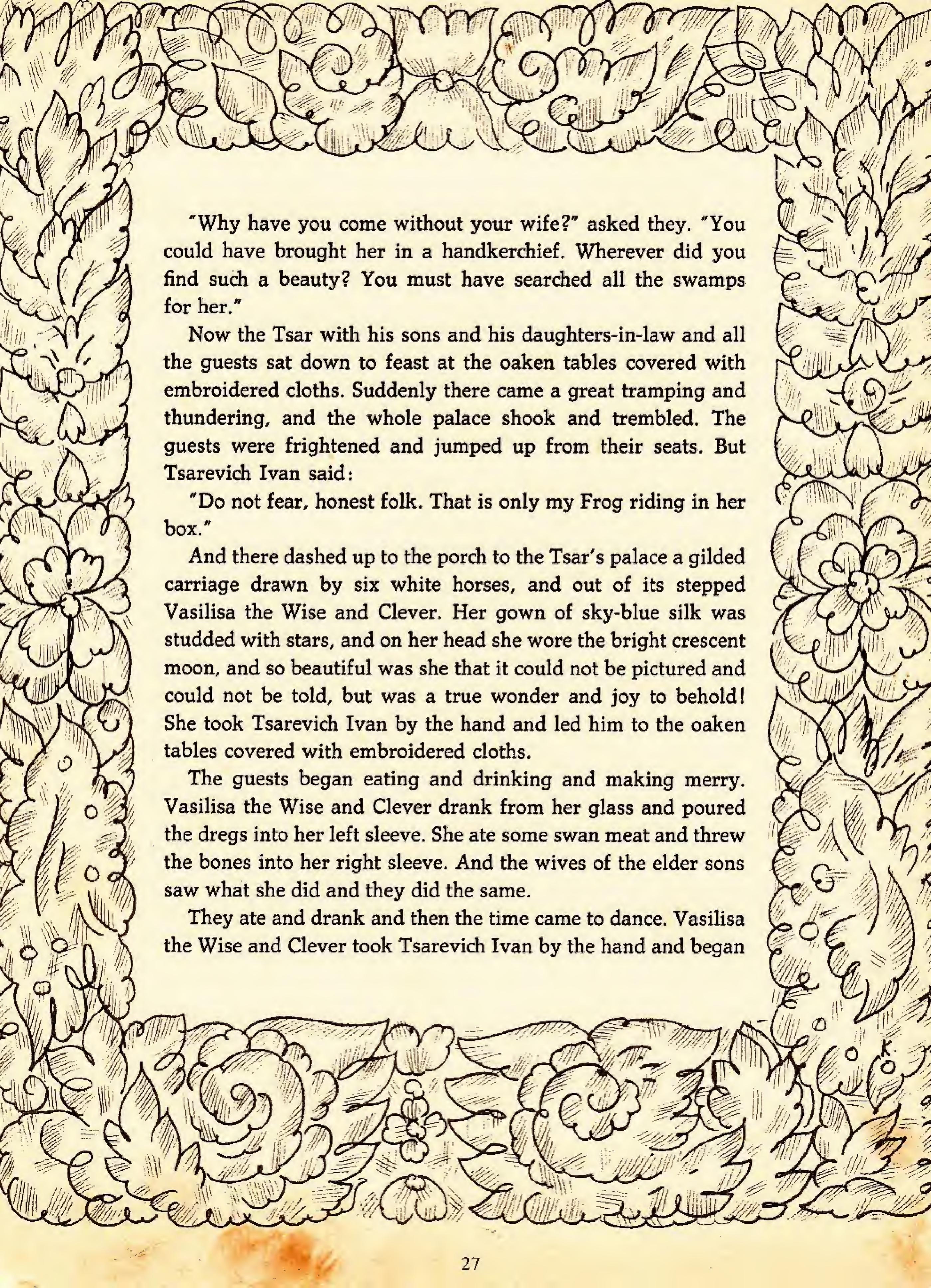
"Croak, croak, why are you so sad, Tsarevich Ivan? Is it that your father has grieved you by an unkind word?"

"Oh, Frog, Frog!" cried Tsarevich Ivan. "How can I help being sad? The Tsar has ordered me to bring you to his feast, and how can I show you to people!"

Said the Frog in reply:

"Do not grieve, Tsarevich Ivan, but go to the feast alone, and I will follow later. When you hear a great tramping and thundering, do not be afraid, but if they ask you what it is, say: 'That is my Frog riding in her box.'"

So Tsarevich Ivan went to the feast alone, and his elder brothers came with the wives who were all dressed up in their finest clothes and had their brows blackened and roses painted on their cheeks. They stood there, and they made fun of Tsarevich Ivan.



"Why have you come without your wife?" asked they. "You could have brought her in a handkerchief. Wherever did you find such a beauty? You must have searched all the swamps for her."

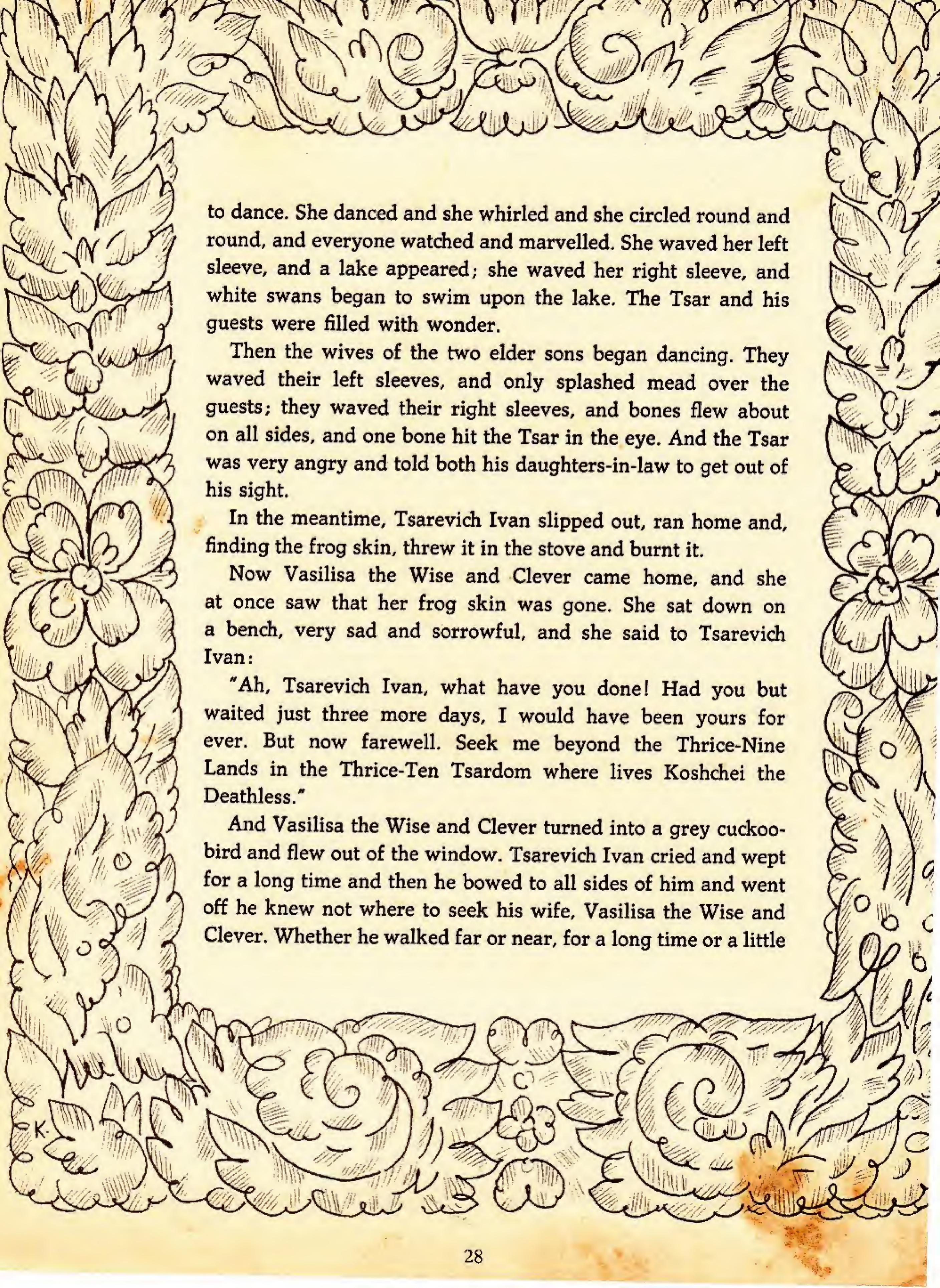
Now the Tsar with his sons and his daughters-in-law and all the guests sat down to feast at the oaken tables covered with embroidered cloths. Suddenly there came a great tramping and thundering, and the whole palace shook and trembled. The guests were frightened and jumped up from their seats. But Tsarevich Ivan said:

"Do not fear, honest folk. That is only my Frog riding in her box."

And there dashed up to the porch to the Tsar's palace a gilded carriage drawn by six white horses, and out of its stepped Vasilisa the Wise and Clever. Her gown of sky-blue silk was studded with stars, and on her head she wore the bright crescent moon, and so beautiful was she that it could not be pictured and could not be told, but was a true wonder and joy to behold! She took Tsarevich Ivan by the hand and led him to the oaken tables covered with embroidered cloths.

The guests began eating and drinking and making merry. Vasilisa the Wise and Clever drank from her glass and poured the dregs into her left sleeve. She ate some swan meat and threw the bones into her right sleeve. And the wives of the elder sons saw what she did and they did the same.

They ate and drank and then the time came to dance. Vasilisa the Wise and Clever took Tsarevich Ivan by the hand and began



to dance. She danced and she whirled and she circled round and round, and everyone watched and marvelled. She waved her left sleeve, and a lake appeared; she waved her right sleeve, and white swans began to swim upon the lake. The Tsar and his guests were filled with wonder.

Then the wives of the two elder sons began dancing. They waved their left sleeves, and only splashed mead over the guests; they waved their right sleeves, and bones flew about on all sides, and one bone hit the Tsar in the eye. And the Tsar was very angry and told both his daughters-in-law to get out of his sight.

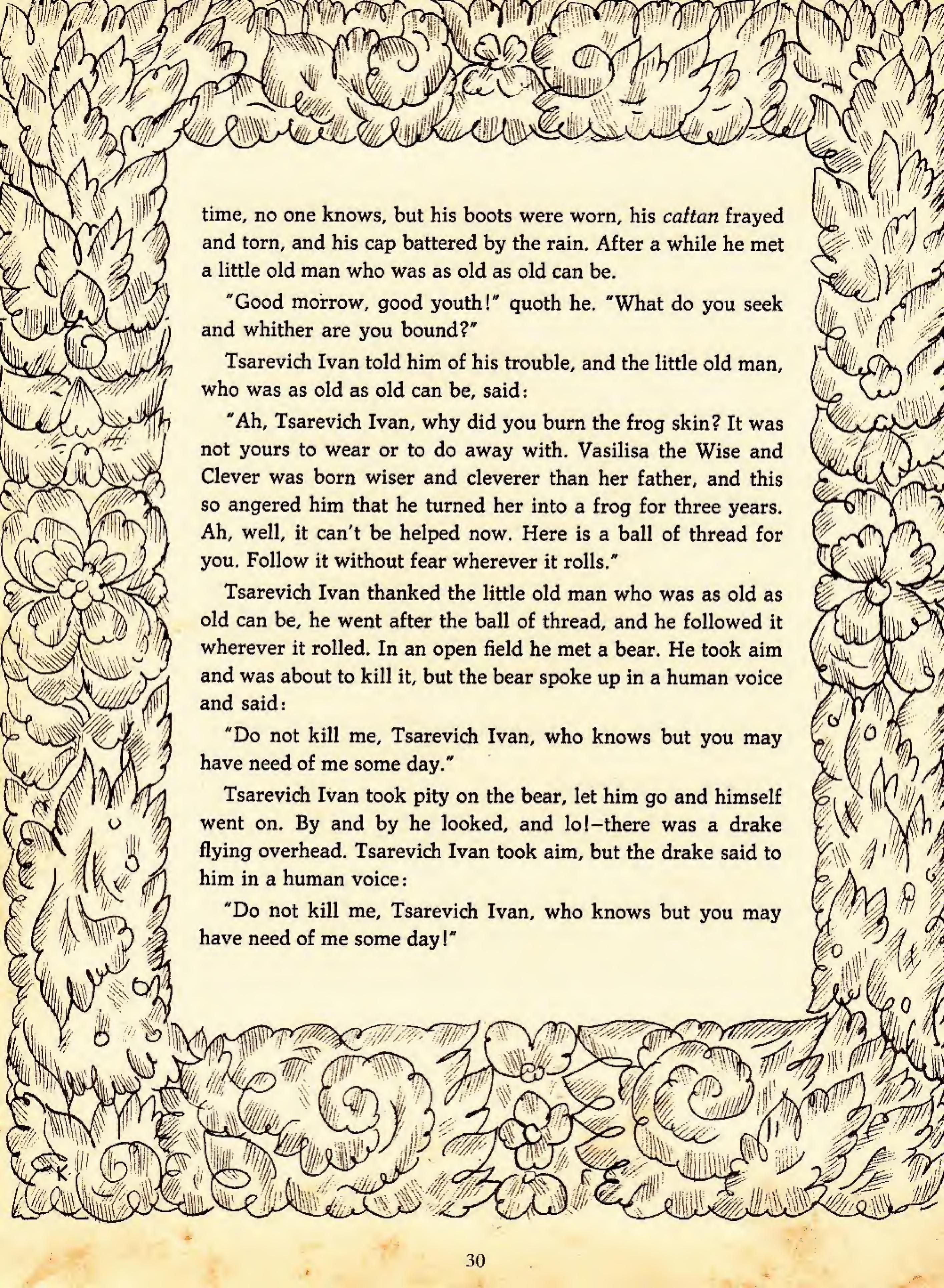
In the meantime, Tsarevich Ivan slipped out, ran home and, finding the frog skin, threw it in the stove and burnt it.

Now Vasilisa the Wise and Clever came home, and she at once saw that her frog skin was gone. She sat down on a bench, very sad and sorrowful, and she said to Tsarevich Ivan:

"Ah, Tsarevich Ivan, what have you done! Had you but waited just three more days, I would have been yours for ever. But now farewell. Seek me beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands in the Thrice-Ten Tsardom where lives Koshchei the Deathless."

And Vasilisa the Wise and Clever turned into a grey cuckoo-bird and flew out of the window. Tsarevich Ivan cried and wept for a long time and then he bowed to all sides of him and went off he knew not where to seek his wife, Vasilisa the Wise and Clever. Whether he walked far or near, for a long time or a little





time, no one knows, but his boots were worn, his *caftan* frayed and torn, and his cap battered by the rain. After a while he met a little old man who was as old as old can be.

"Good morrow, good youth!" quoth he. "What do you seek and whither are you bound?"

Tsarevich Ivan told him of his trouble, and the little old man, who was as old as old can be, said:

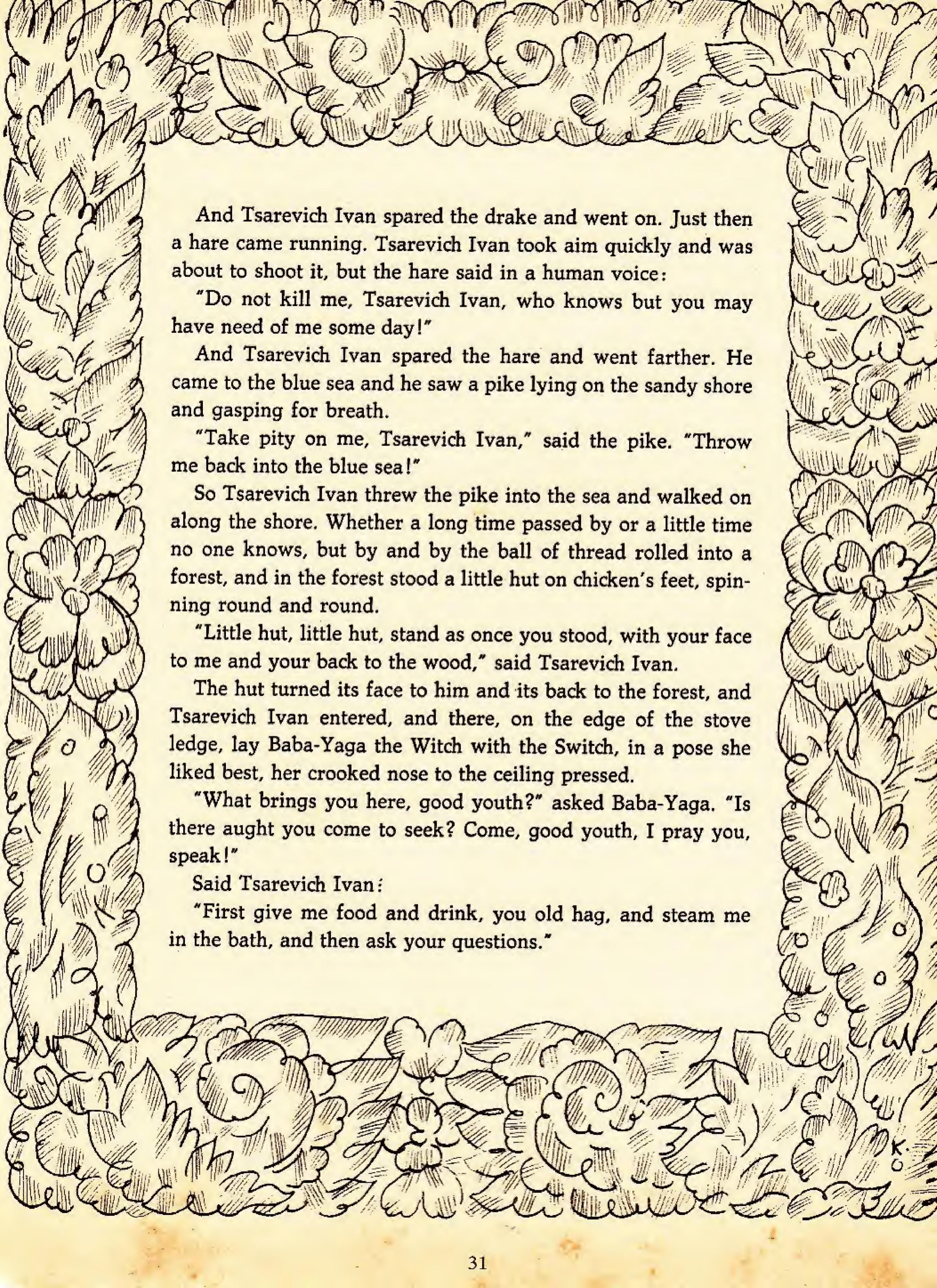
"Ah, Tsarevich Ivan, why did you burn the frog skin? It was not yours to wear or to do away with. Vasilisa the Wise and Clever was born wiser and cleverer than her father, and this so angered him that he turned her into a frog for three years. Ah, well, it can't be helped now. Here is a ball of thread for you. Follow it without fear wherever it rolls."

Tsarevich Ivan thanked the little old man who was as old as old can be, he went after the ball of thread, and he followed it wherever it rolled. In an open field he met a bear. He took aim and was about to kill it, but the bear spoke up in a human voice and said:

"Do not kill me, Tsarevich Ivan, who knows but you may have need of me some day."

Tsarevich Ivan took pity on the bear, let him go and himself went on. By and by he looked, and lo!—there was a drake flying overhead. Tsarevich Ivan took aim, but the drake said to him in a human voice:

"Do not kill me, Tsarevich Ivan, who knows but you may have need of me some day!"



And Tsarevich Ivan spared the drake and went on. Just then a hare came running. Tsarevich Ivan took aim quickly and was about to shoot it, but the hare said in a human voice:

"Do not kill me, Tsarevich Ivan, who knows but you may have need of me some day!"

And Tsarevich Ivan spared the hare and went farther. He came to the blue sea and he saw a pike lying on the sandy shore and gasping for breath.

"Take pity on me, Tsarevich Ivan," said the pike. "Throw me back into the blue sea!"

So Tsarevich Ivan threw the pike into the sea and walked on along the shore. Whether a long time passed by or a little time no one knows, but by and by the ball of thread rolled into a forest, and in the forest stood a little hut on chicken's feet, spinning round and round.

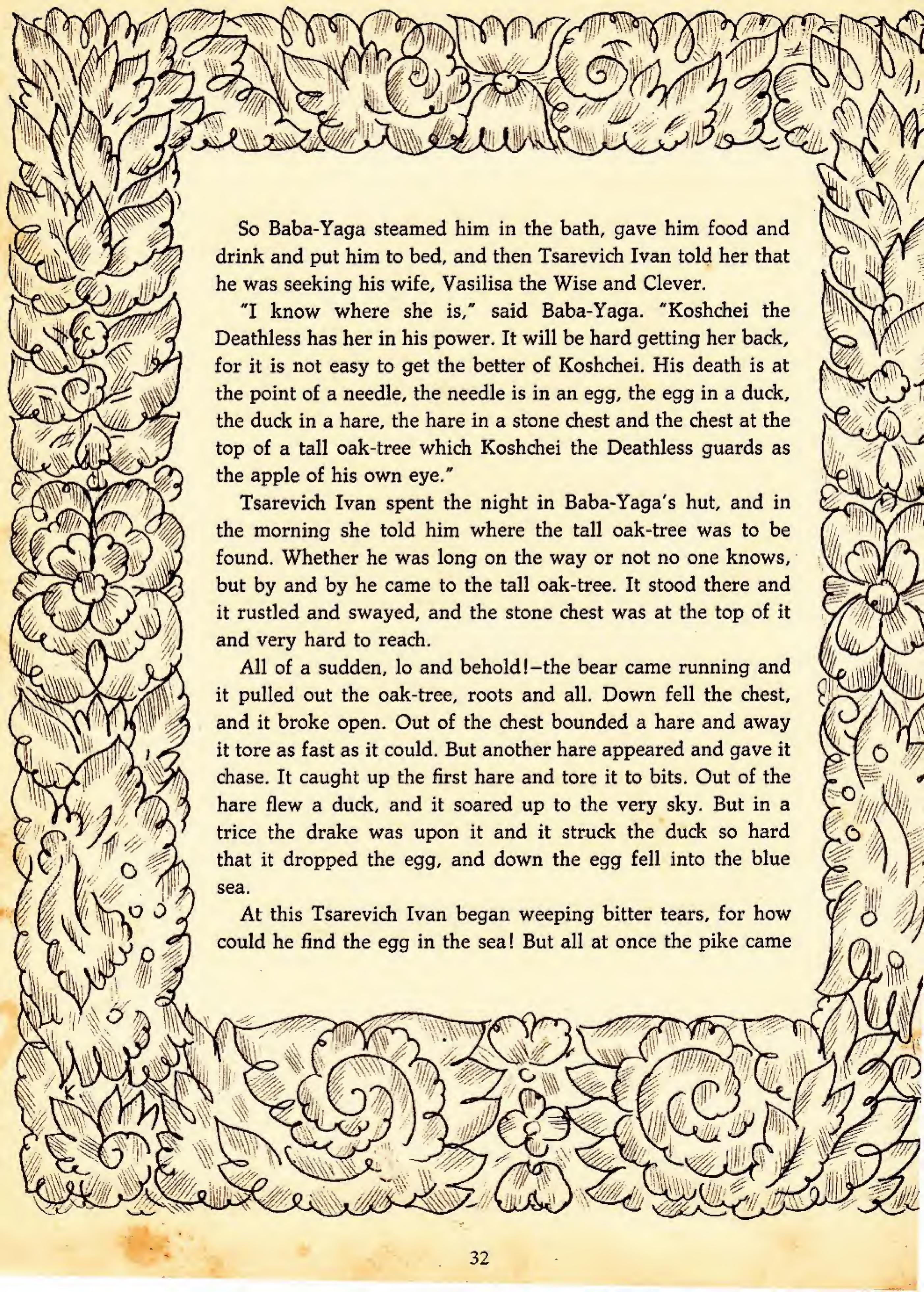
"Little hut, little hut, stand as once you stood, with your face to me and your back to the wood," said Tsarevich Ivan.

The hut turned its face to him and its back to the forest, and Tsarevich Ivan entered, and there, on the edge of the stove ledge, lay Baba-Yaga the Witch with the Switch, in a pose she liked best, her crooked nose to the ceiling pressed.

"What brings you here, good youth?" asked Baba-Yaga. "Is there aught you come to seek? Come, good youth, I pray you, speak!"

Said Tsarevich Ivan:

"First give me food and drink, you old hag, and steam me in the bath, and then ask your questions."



So Baba-Yaga steamed him in the bath, gave him food and drink and put him to bed, and then Tsarevich Ivan told her that he was seeking his wife, Vasilisa the Wise and Clever.

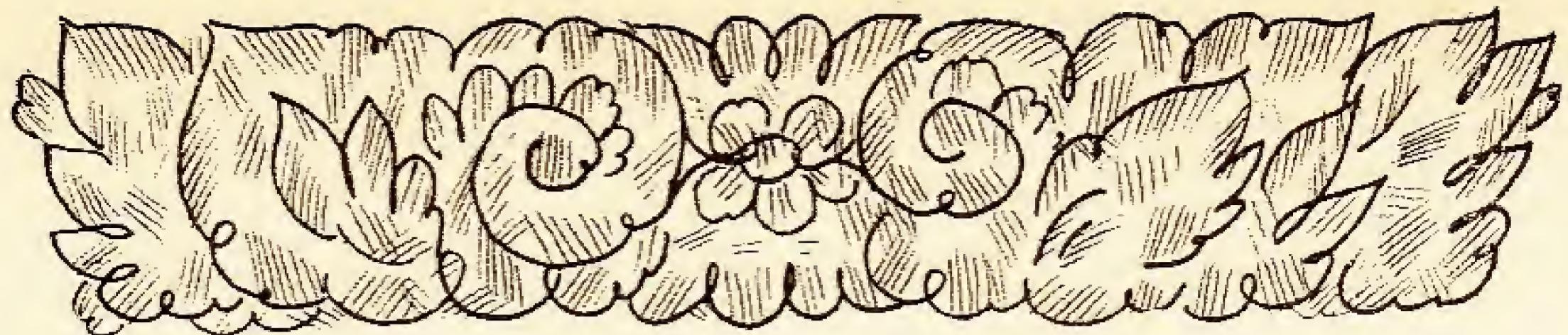
"I know where she is," said Baba-Yaga. "Koshchei the Deathless has her in his power. It will be hard getting her back, for it is not easy to get the better of Koshchei. His death is at the point of a needle, the needle is in an egg, the egg in a duck, the duck in a hare, the hare in a stone chest and the chest at the top of a tall oak-tree which Koshchei the Deathless guards as the apple of his own eye."

Tsarevich Ivan spent the night in Baba-Yaga's hut, and in the morning she told him where the tall oak-tree was to be found. Whether he was long on the way or not no one knows, but by and by he came to the tall oak-tree. It stood there and it rustled and swayed, and the stone chest was at the top of it and very hard to reach.

All of a sudden, lo and behold!—the bear came running and it pulled out the oak-tree, roots and all. Down fell the chest, and it broke open. Out of the chest bounded a hare and away it tore as fast as it could. But another hare appeared and gave it chase. It caught up the first hare and tore it to bits. Out of the hare flew a duck, and it soared up to the very sky. But in a trice the drake was upon it and it struck the duck so hard that it dropped the egg, and down the egg fell into the blue sea.

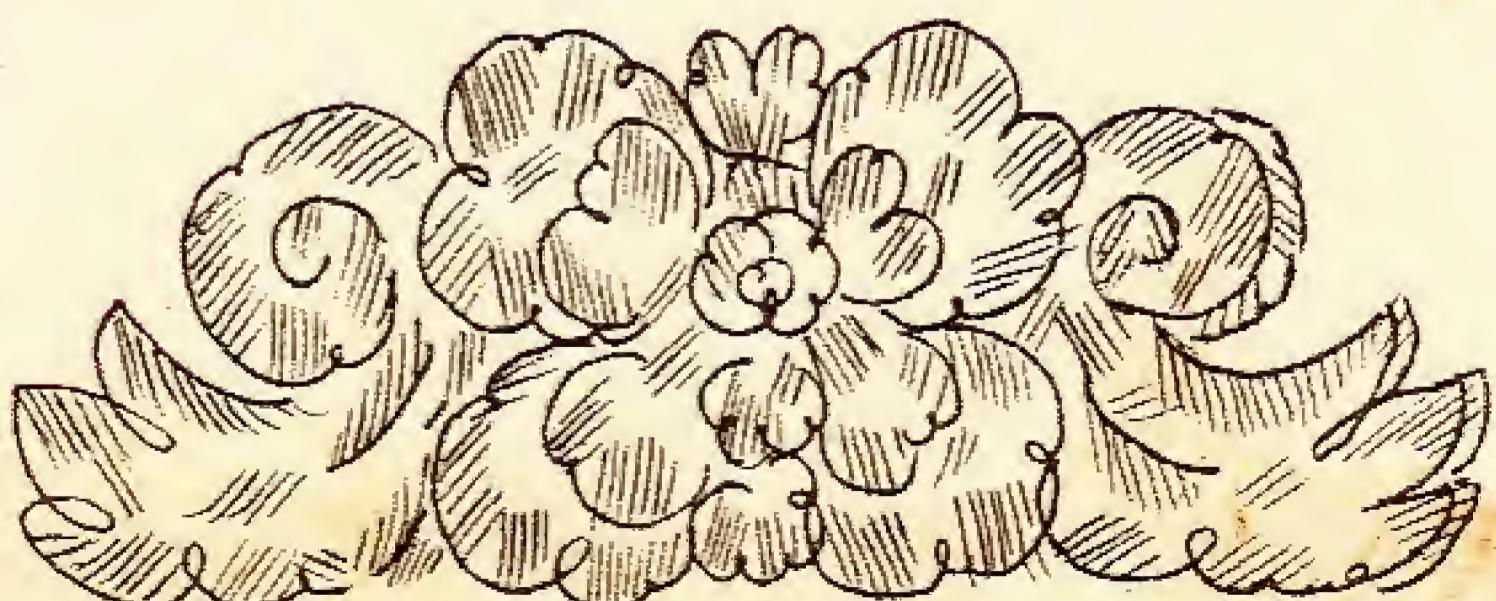
At this Tsarevich Ivan began weeping bitter tears, for how could he find the egg in the sea! But all at once the pike came

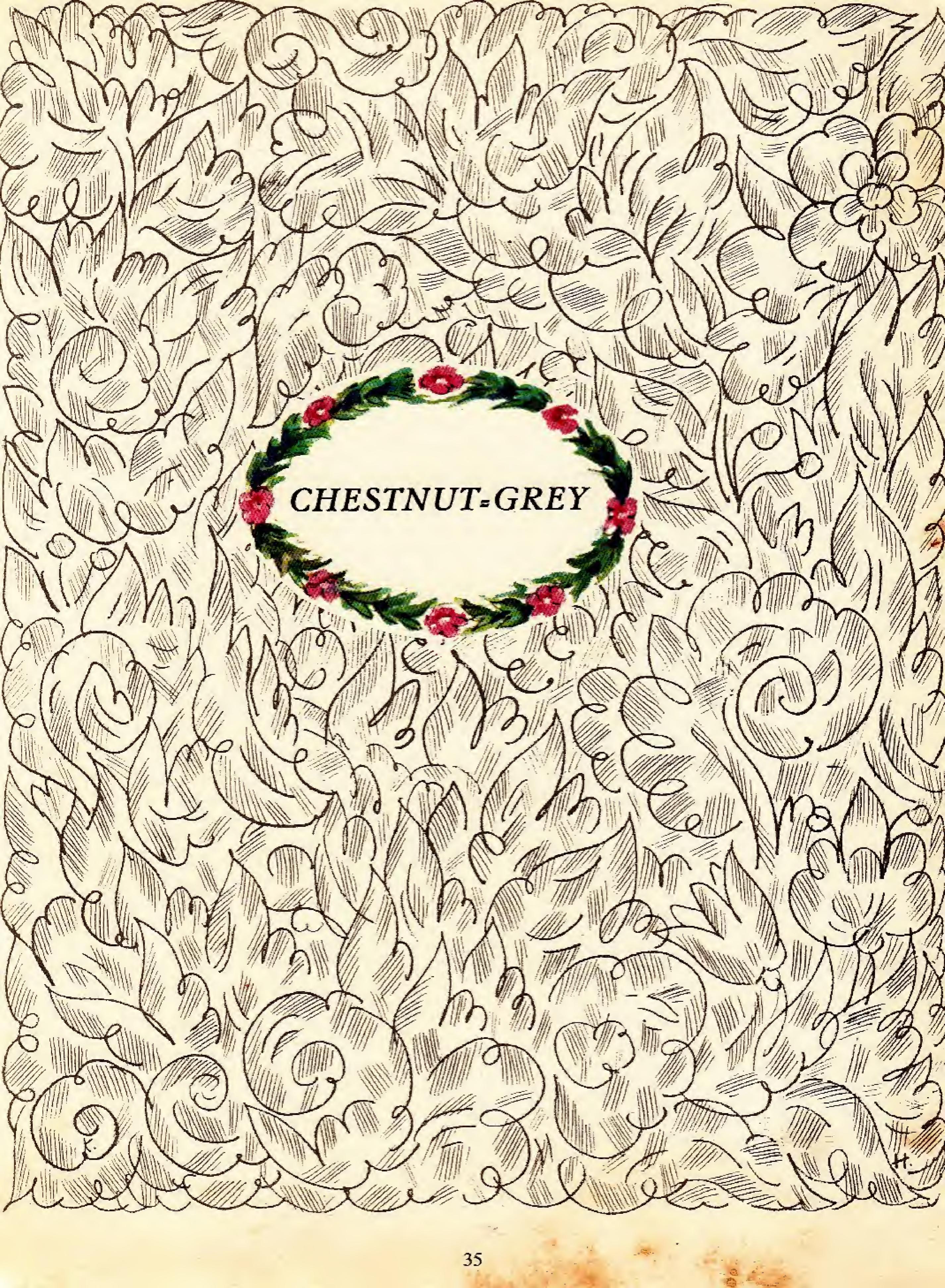




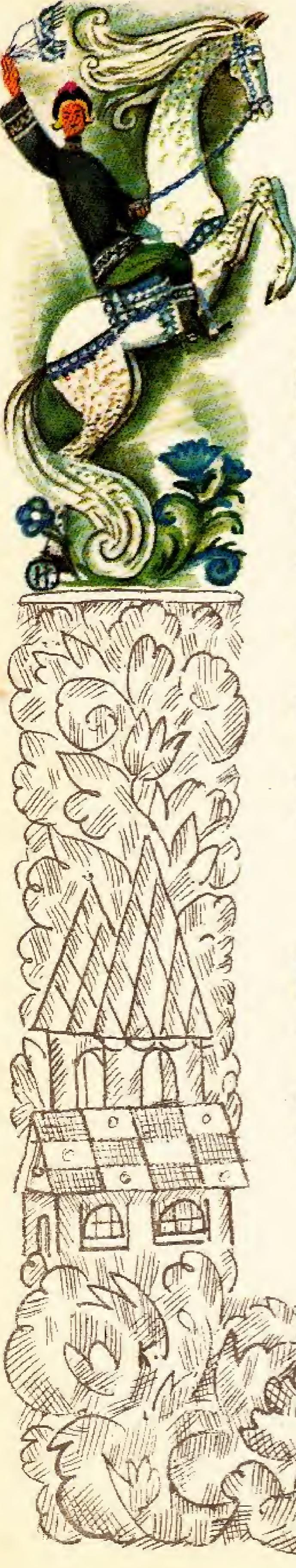
swimming to the shore with the egg in its mouth. Tsarevich Ivan cracked the egg, took out the needle and began trying to break off the point. The more he bent it, the more Koshchei the Deathless writhed and twisted. But all in vain. For Tsarevich Ivan broke off the point of the needle, and Koshchei fell down dead.

Tsarevich Ivan then went to Koshchei's palace of white stone. And Vasilisa the Wise and Clever ran out to him and kissed him on his honey-sweet mouth. And Tsarevich Ivan and Vasilisa the Wise and Clever went back to their own home and lived together long and happily till they were quite, quite old.





**CHESTNUT-GREY**



**O**nce upon a time there lived an old man who had three sons. The two elder sons were well-favoured young men who liked to wear fine clothes and were thrifty husbandmen, but the youngest Ivan the Fool, was none of those things. He spent most of his time at home sitting on the stove ledge and only going out to gather mushrooms in the forest.

When the time came for the old man to die, he called his three sons to his side and said to them:

"When I die, you must come to my grave every night for three nights and bring me some bread to eat."

The old man died and was buried, and that night the time came for the eldest brother to go to his grave. But he was too lazy or else too frightened to go, and he said to Ivan the Fool:

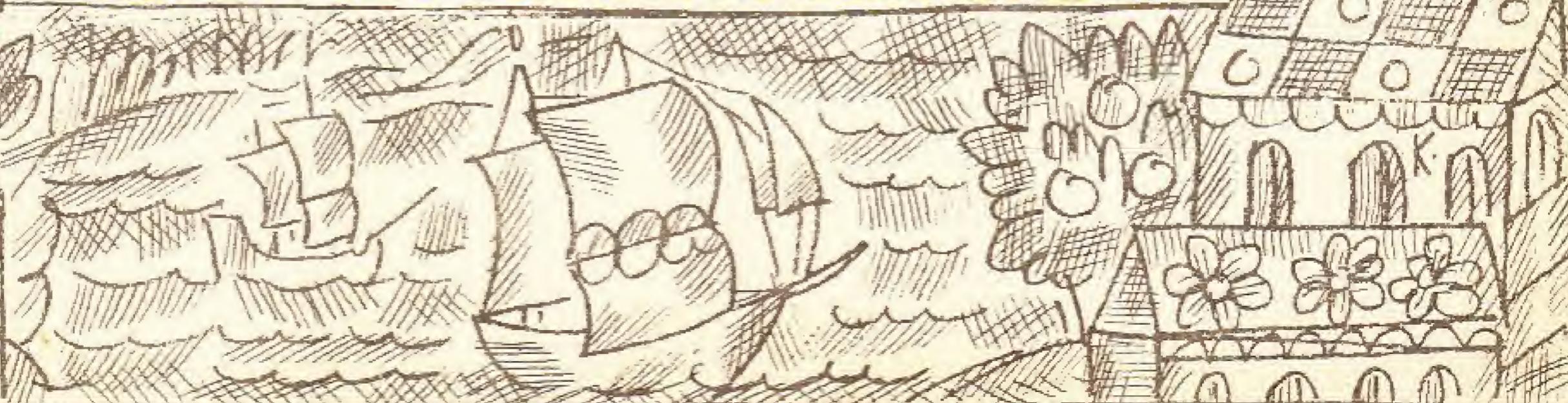
"If you will only go in my stead to our father's grave tonight, Ivan, I shall buy you a honey-cake."

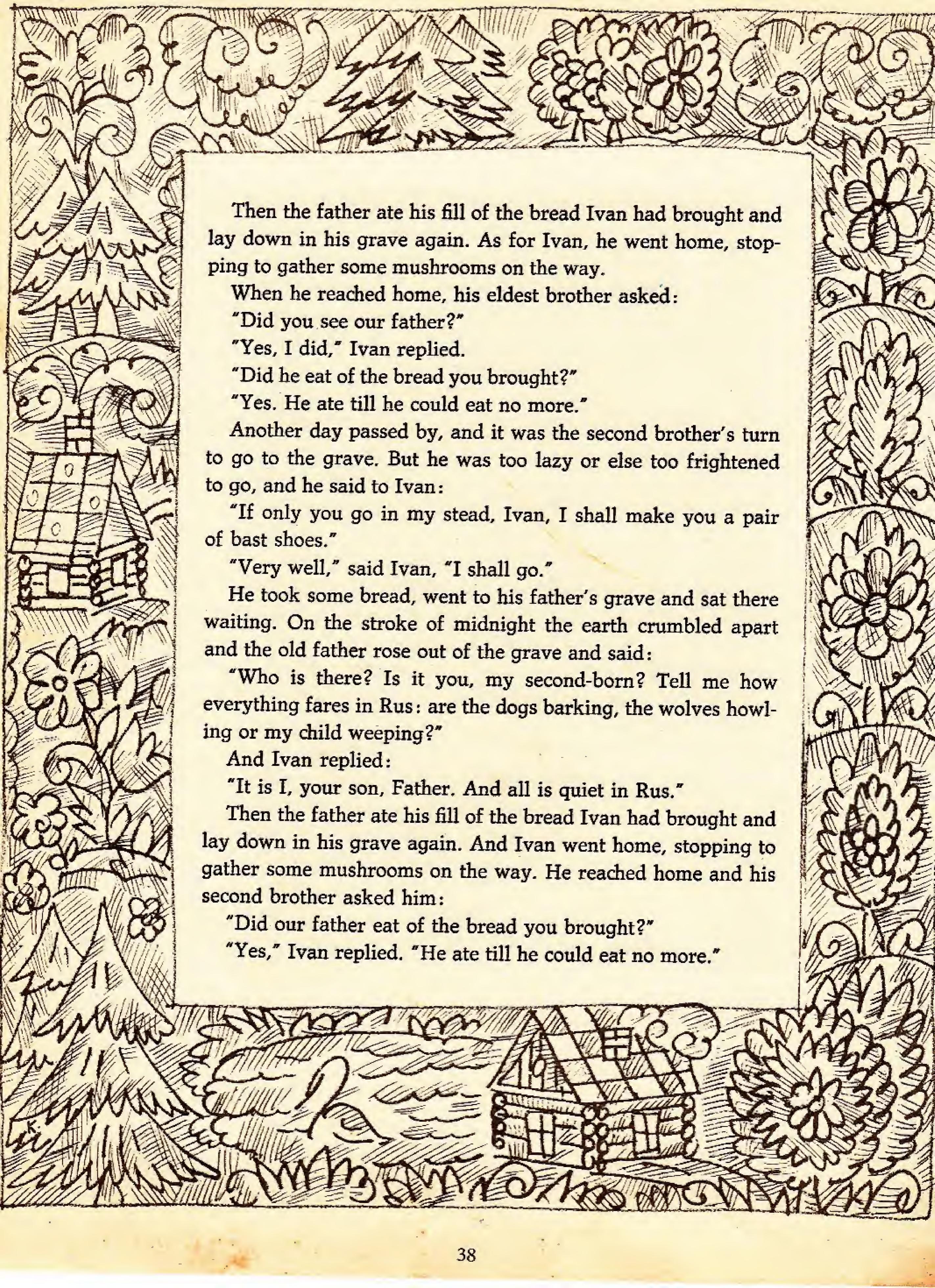
Ivan readily agreed, took some bread and went to his father's grave. He sat down by the grave and waited to see what would happen. On the stroke of midnight the earth crumbled apart and the old father rose out of his grave and said:

"Who is there? Is it you, my first-born? Tell me how everything fares in Rus: are the dogs barking, the wolves howling or my child weeping?"

And Ivan replied:

"It is I, your son, Father. And all is quiet in Rus."





Then the father ate his fill of the bread Ivan had brought and lay down in his grave again. As for Ivan, he went home, stopping to gather some mushrooms on the way.

When he reached home, his eldest brother asked:

"Did you see our father?"

"Yes, I did," Ivan replied.

"Did he eat of the bread you brought?"

"Yes. He ate till he could eat no more."

Another day passed by, and it was the second brother's turn to go to the grave. But he was too lazy or else too frightened to go, and he said to Ivan:

"If only you go in my stead, Ivan, I shall make you a pair of bast shoes."

"Very well," said Ivan, "I shall go."

He took some bread, went to his father's grave and sat there waiting. On the stroke of midnight the earth crumbled apart and the old father rose out of the grave and said:

"Who is there? Is it you, my second-born? Tell me how everything fares in Rus: are the dogs barking, the wolves howling or my child weeping?"

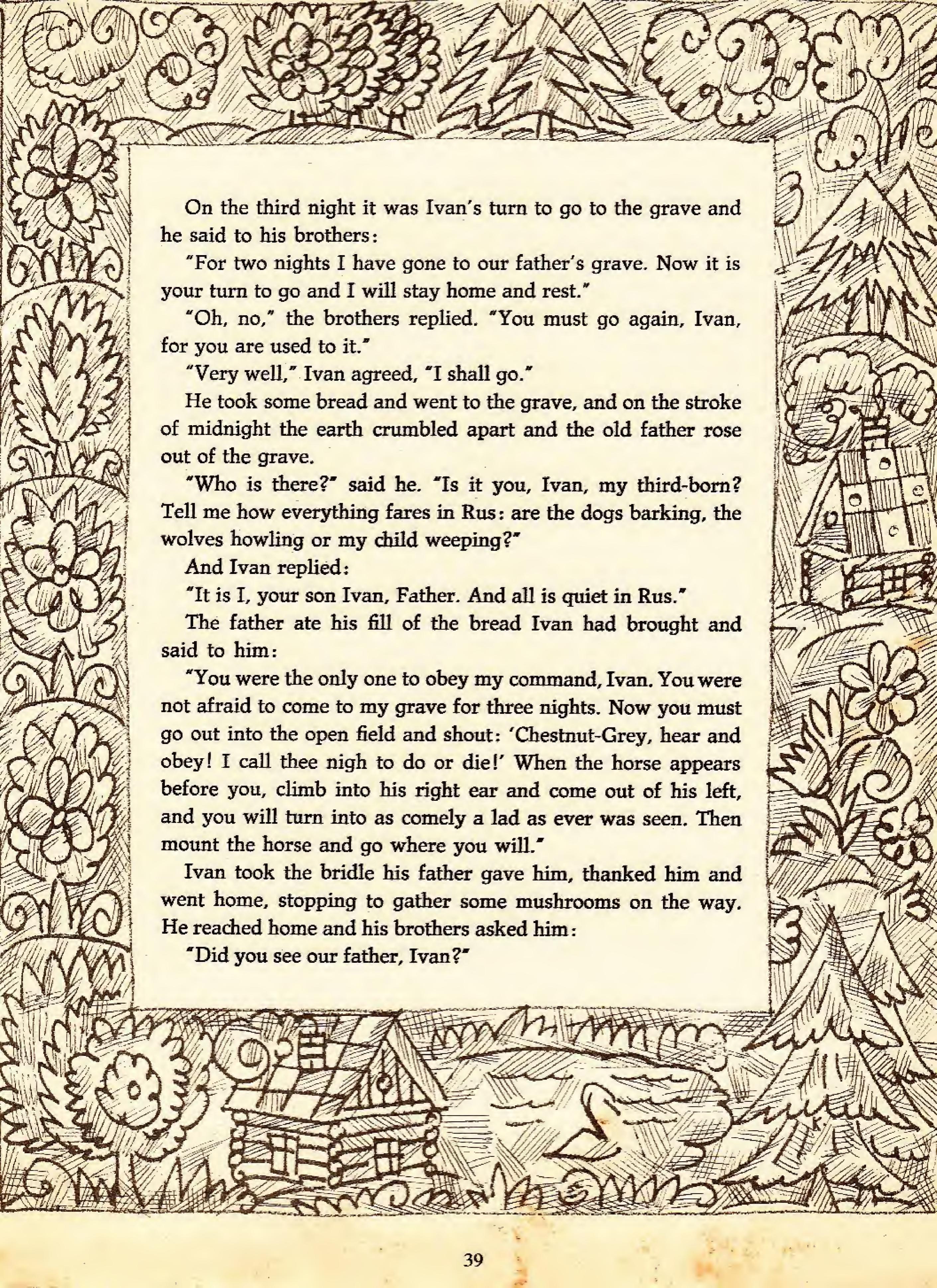
And Ivan replied:

"It is I, your son, Father. And all is quiet in Rus."

Then the father ate his fill of the bread Ivan had brought and lay down in his grave again. And Ivan went home, stopping to gather some mushrooms on the way. He reached home and his second brother asked him:

"Did our father eat of the bread you brought?"

"Yes," Ivan replied. "He ate till he could eat no more."



On the third night it was Ivan's turn to go to the grave and he said to his brothers:

"For two nights I have gone to our father's grave. Now it is your turn to go and I will stay home and rest."

"Oh, no," the brothers replied. "You must go again, Ivan, for you are used to it."

"Very well," Ivan agreed, "I shall go."

He took some bread and went to the grave, and on the stroke of midnight the earth crumbled apart and the old father rose out of the grave.

"Who is there?" said he. "Is it you, Ivan, my third-born? Tell me how everything fares in Rus: are the dogs barking, the wolves howling or my child weeping?"

And Ivan replied:

"It is I, your son Ivan, Father. And all is quiet in Rus."

The father ate his fill of the bread Ivan had brought and said to him:

"You were the only one to obey my command, Ivan. You were not afraid to come to my grave for three nights. Now you must go out into the open field and shout: 'Chestnut-Grey, hear and obey! I call thee nigh to do or die!' When the horse appears before you, climb into his right ear and come out of his left, and you will turn into as comely a lad as ever was seen. Then mount the horse and go where you will."

Ivan took the bridle his father gave him, thanked him and went home, stopping to gather some mushrooms on the way. He reached home and his brothers asked him:

"Did you see our father, Ivan?"

"Yes, I did," Ivan replied.

"Did he eat of the bread you brought?"

"Yes, he ate till he could eat no more and he bade me not to go to his grave any more."

Now, at this very time the Tsar had a call sounded abroad for all handsome, unmarried young men to gather at court. The Tsar's daughter, Tsarevna Lovely, had ordered a castle of twelve pillars and twelve rows of oak logs to be built for herself. And there she meant to sit at the window of the top chamber and await the one who would leap on his steed as high as her window and place a kiss on her lips. To him who succeeded, whether of high or of low birth, the Tsar would give Tsarevna Lovely, his daughter, in marriage and half his tsardom besides.

News of this came to the ears of Ivan's brothers, who agreed between them to try their luck.

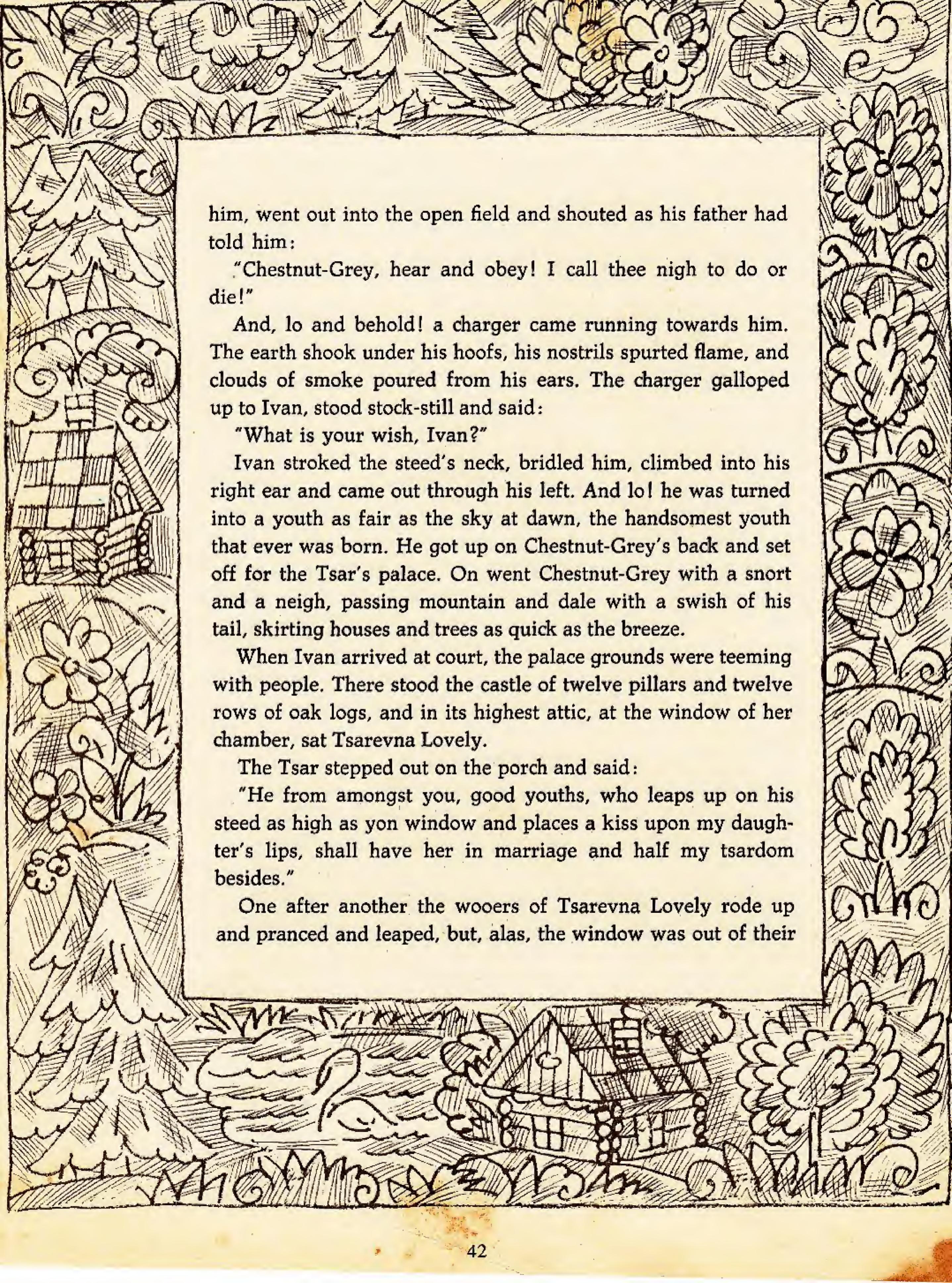
They gave a feed of oats to their goodly steeds and led them from the stables, and themselves put on their best apparel and combed down their curly locks. And Ivan, who was sitting on the stove ledge behind the chimney, said to them:

"Take me with you, my brothers, and let me try my luck, too."

"You silly sit-on-the-stove!" laughed they. "You will only be mocked at if you go with us. Better go and hunt for mushrooms in the forest."

The brothers mounted their goodly steeds, cocked their hats, gave a whistle and a whoop and galloped off down the road in a cloud of dust. And Ivan took the bridle his father had given





him, went out into the open field and shouted as his father had told him:

"Chestnut-Grey, hear and obey! I call thee nigh to do or die!"

And, lo and behold! a charger came running towards him. The earth shook under his hoofs, his nostrils spurted flame, and clouds of smoke poured from his ears. The charger galloped up to Ivan, stood stock-still and said:

"What is your wish, Ivan?"

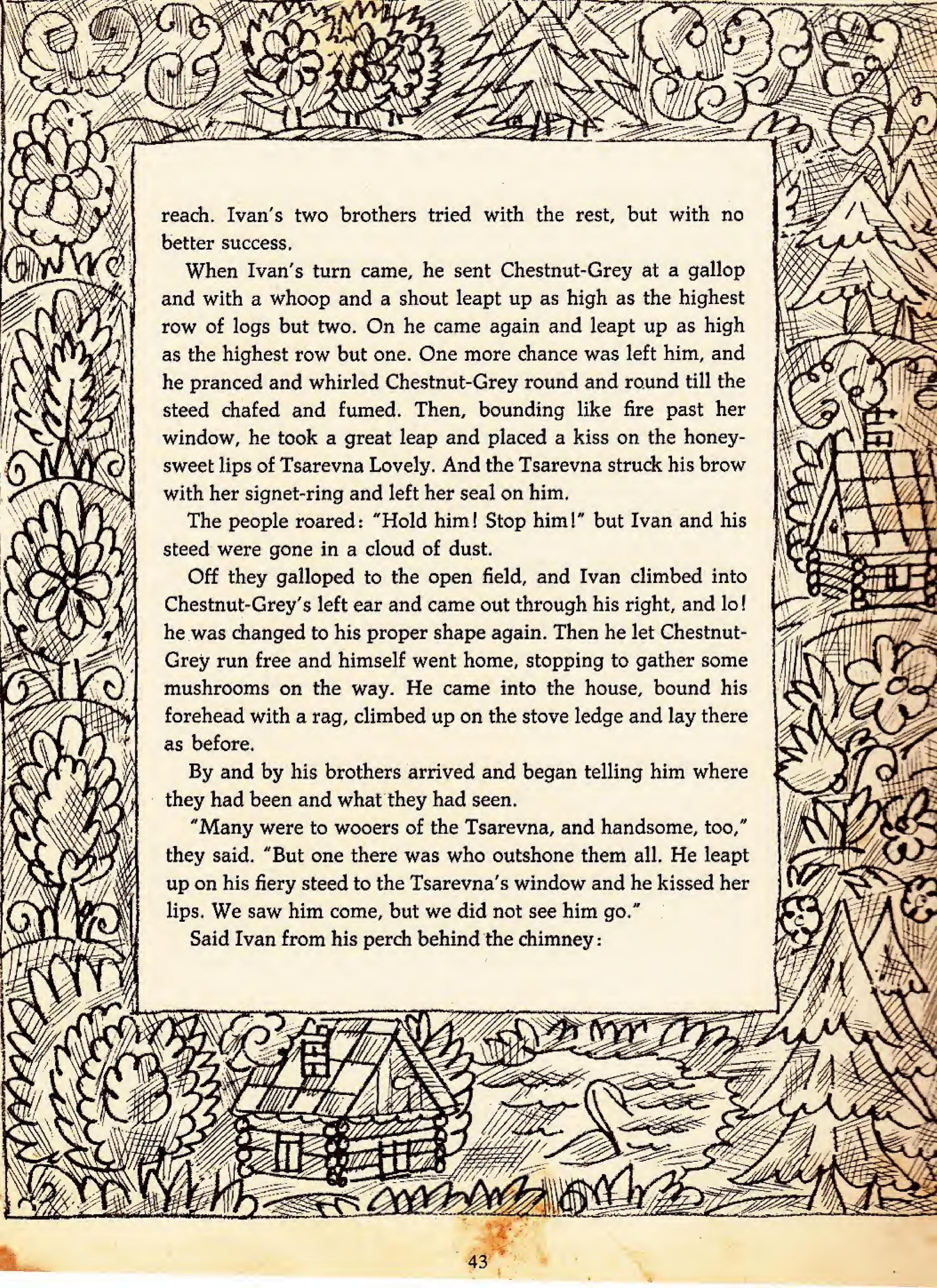
Ivan stroked the steed's neck, bridled him, climbed into his right ear and came out through his left. And lo! he was turned into a youth as fair as the sky at dawn, the handsomest youth that ever was born. He got up on Chestnut-Grey's back and set off for the Tsar's palace. On went Chestnut-Grey with a snort and a neigh, passing mountain and dale with a swish of his tail, skirting houses and trees as quick as the breeze.

When Ivan arrived at court, the palace grounds were teeming with people. There stood the castle of twelve pillars and twelve rows of oak logs, and in its highest attic, at the window of her chamber, sat Tsarevna Lovely.

The Tsar stepped out on the porch and said:

"He from amongst you, good youths, who leaps up on his steed as high as yon window and places a kiss upon my daughter's lips, shall have her in marriage and half my tsardom besides."

One after another the wooers of Tsarevna Lovely rode up and pranced and leaped, but, alas, the window was out of their



reach. Ivan's two brothers tried with the rest, but with no better success.

When Ivan's turn came, he sent Chestnut-Grey at a gallop and with a whoop and a shout leapt up as high as the highest row of logs but two. On he came again and leapt up as high as the highest row but one. One more chance was left him, and he pranced and whirled Chestnut-Grey round and round till the steed chafed and fumed. Then, bounding like fire past her window, he took a great leap and placed a kiss on the honey-sweet lips of Tsarevna Lovely. And the Tsarevna struck his brow with her signet-ring and left her seal on him.

The people roared: "Hold him! Stop him!" but Ivan and his steed were gone in a cloud of dust.

Off they galloped to the open field, and Ivan climbed into Chestnut-Grey's left ear and came out through his right, and lo! he was changed to his proper shape again. Then he let Chestnut-Grey run free and himself went home, stopping to gather some mushrooms on the way. He came into the house, bound his forehead with a rag, climbed up on the stove ledge and lay there as before.

By and by his brothers arrived and began telling him where they had been and what they had seen.

"Many were to wooers of the Tsarevna, and handsome, too," they said. "But one there was who outshone them all. He leapt up on his fiery steed to the Tsarevna's window and he kissed her lips. We saw him come, but we did not see him go."

Said Ivan from his perch behind the chimney:

"Perhaps it was me you saw."

His brothers flew into a temper and said:

"Stop your silly talk, fool! Sit there on your stove and eat your mushrooms."

Then Ivan untied the rag that covered the seal from the Tsarevna's signet-ring and at once a bright glow lit up the hut. The brothers were frightened and cried:

"What are you doing, fool? You'll burn down the house!"

The next day the Tsar held a feast to which he summoned all his subjects, boyars and nobles and common folk, rich and poor, young and old.

Ivan's brothers, too, prepared to attend the feast.

"Take me with you, my brothers," Ivan begged.

"What?" they laughed. "You will only be mocked at by all. Stay here on your stove and eat your mushrooms."

The brothers then mounted their goodly steeds and rode away, and Ivan followed them on foot. He came to the Tsar's palace and seated himself in a far corner. Tsarevna Lovely now began to make the round of all the guests. She offered each a drink from the cup of mead she carried and she looked at their brows to see if her seal were there.

She made the round of all the guests except Ivan, and when she approached him her heart sank. He was all smutted with soot and his hair stood on end.

Said Tsarevna Lovely:

"Who are you? Where do you come from? And why is your brow bound with a rag?"





"I hurt myself in falling," Ivan replied.

The Tsarevna unwound the rag and a bright glow at once lit up the palace.

"That is my seal!" she cried. "Here is my betrothed!"

The Tsar came up to Ivan, looked at him and said:

"Oh, no, Tsarevna Lovely! This cannot be your betrothed! He is all sooty and very plain."

Said Ivan to the Tsar:

"Allow me to wash my face, Tsar."

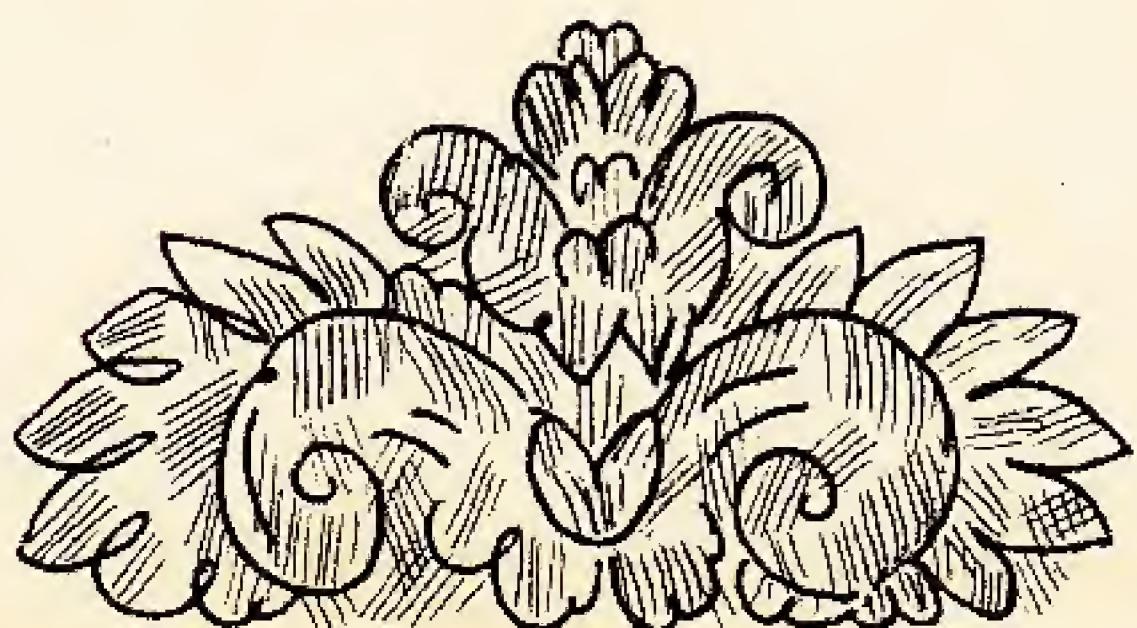
The Tsar gave him leave to do so, and Ivan came out into the courtyard and shouted as his father had taught him to:

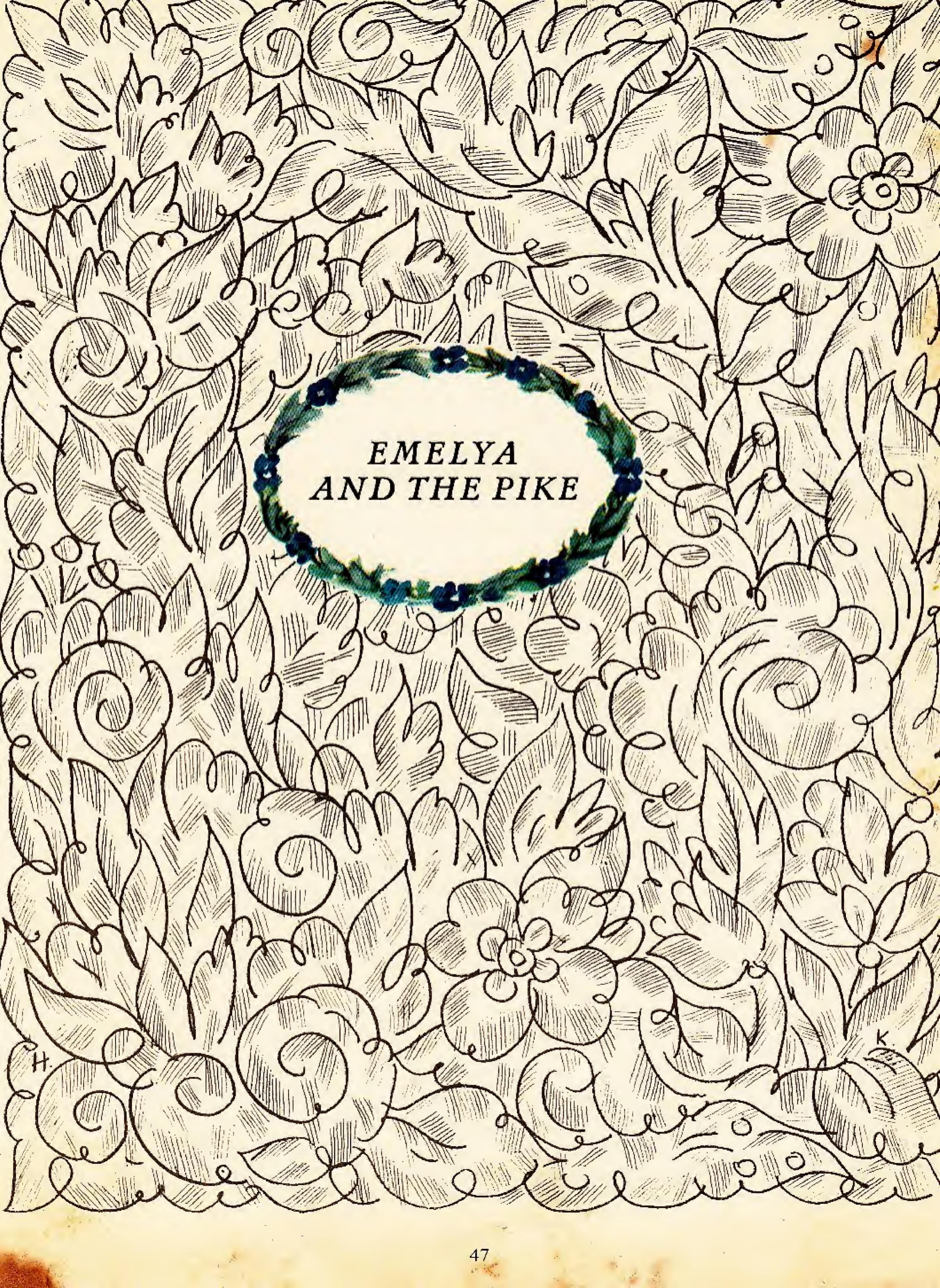
"Chestnut-Grey, hear and obey! I call thee nigh to do or die!"

And lo and behold! Chestnut-Grey came galloping towards him. The earth shook under his hoofs, his nostrils spurted flame, and clouds of smoke poured from his ears. Ivan climbed into his right ear and came out through his left and was turned into a youth as fair as the sky at dawn, the handsomest youth that ever was born. All the people in the palace gave a great gasp when they saw him.

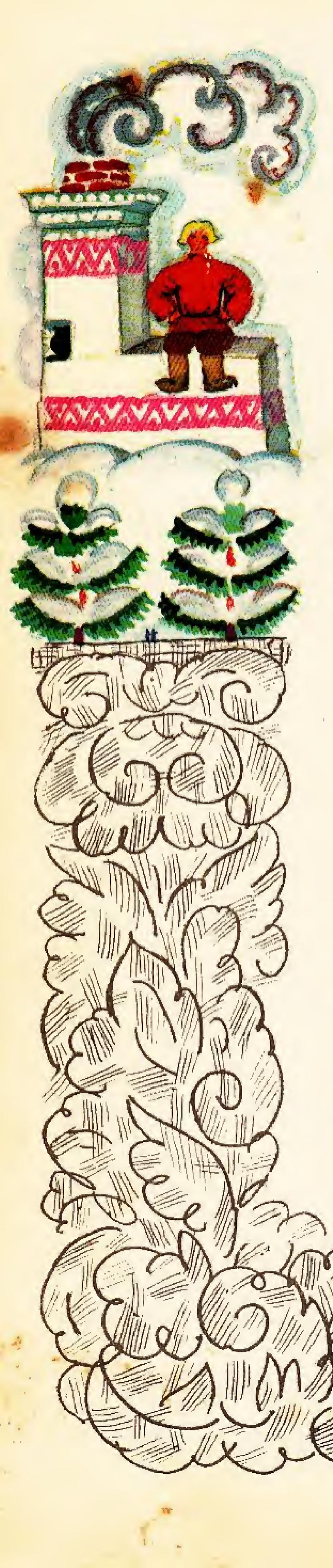
No words were wasted after that.

Ivan married Tsarevna Lovely, and a merry feast was held to celebrate their wedding.





EMELYA  
AND THE PIKE



**O**nce upon a time there lived an old man who had three sons, two of them clever young men and the third, Emelya, a fool.

The two elder brothers were always at work, while Emelya lay on the stove ledge all day long with not a care in the world.

One day the two brothers rode away to market, and their wives said:

"Go and fetch some water, Emelya."

And Emelya, lying on the stove ledge, replied:

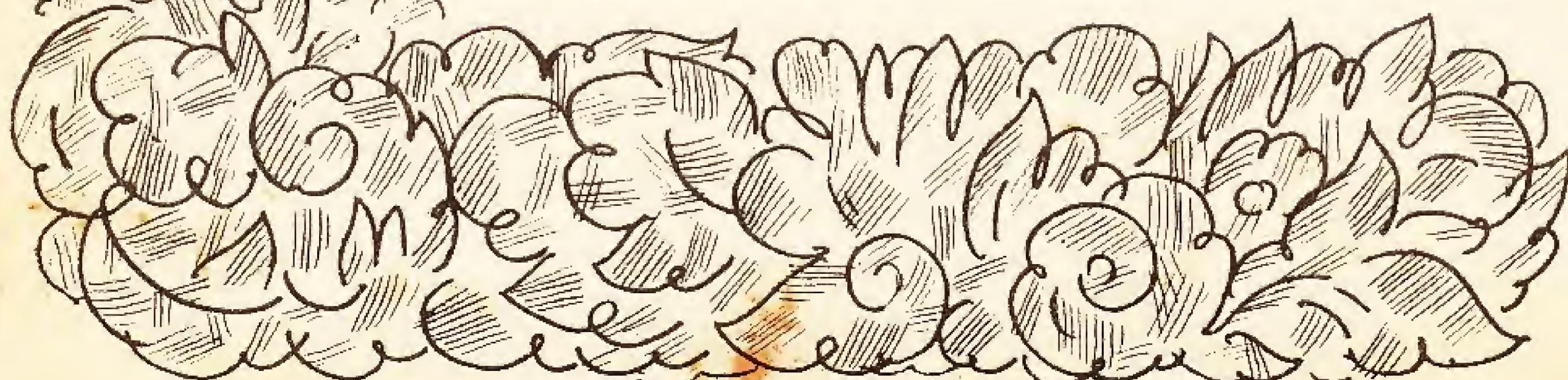
"Not I. I don't want to."

"Go, Emelya, or your brothers will bring no presents for you from the market."

"Oh, all right then."

Down climbed Emelya from the stove, put on his boots and *caftan* and, taking along two pails and an axe, went to the river.

He cut a hole in the ice with his axe, scooped up two pailfuls of water, put down the pails and himself bent down to look into the ice-hole. He looked and he looked and what did he see but a Pike swimming in the water. Out shot his arm, and there was the Pike in his hands.





"We'll have some fine pike soup for dinner to-day!" he exclaimed, delighted.

But the Pike suddenly spoke up in a human voice and said:

"Let me go, Emelya, and I'll do you a good turn, too, some day."

Emelya only laughed.

"What good turn could you do me? No, think I'll take you home and tell my sisters-in-law to make some soup. I do so love pike soup."

But the Pike fell to begging him again and said:

"Do let me go, Emelya, and I'll do anything you wish."

"All right," Emelya replied, "only first you must prove you aren't trying to fool me."

Said the Pike: "Tell me what you want, Emelya."

"I want my pails to go home all by themselves without spilling a drop of water."

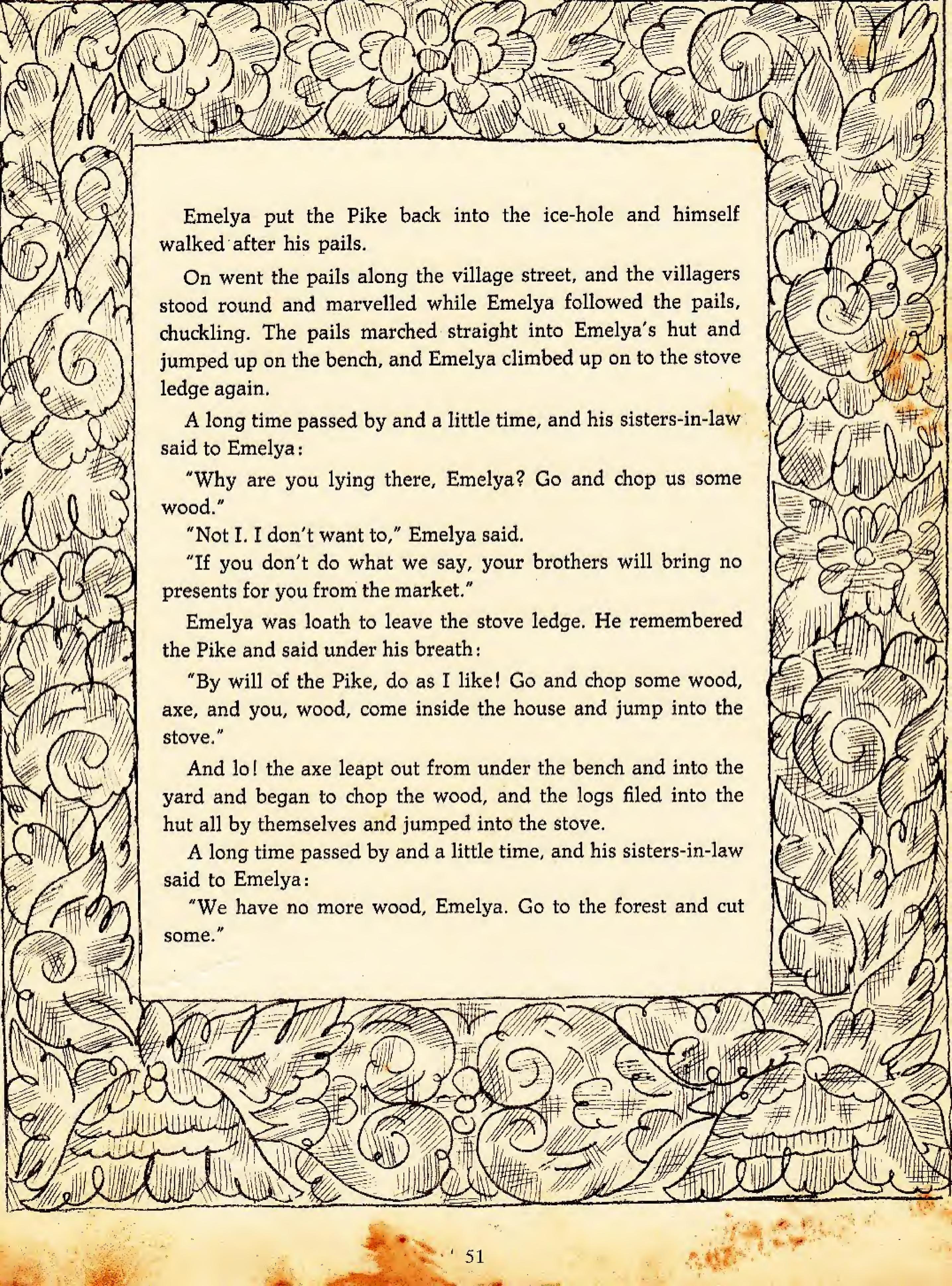
"Very well, Emelya," the Pike said. "Whenever you wish something, you have only to say:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like', and it will all be done at once."

And Emelya, nothing loath, said:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go home, pails, by yourselves!"

And, lo and behold! the pails turned and marched up the hill.



Emelya put the Pike back into the ice-hole and himself walked after his pails.

On went the pails along the village street, and the villagers stood round and marvelled while Emelya followed the pails, chuckling. The pails marched straight into Emelya's hut and jumped up on the bench, and Emelya climbed up on to the stove ledge again.

A long time passed by and a little time, and his sisters-in-law said to Emelya:

"Why are you lying there, Emelya? Go and chop us some wood."

"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya said.

"If you don't do what we say, your brothers will bring no presents for you from the market."

Emelya was loath to leave the stove ledge. He remembered the Pike and said under his breath:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Go and chop some wood, axe, and you, wood, come inside the house and jump into the stove."

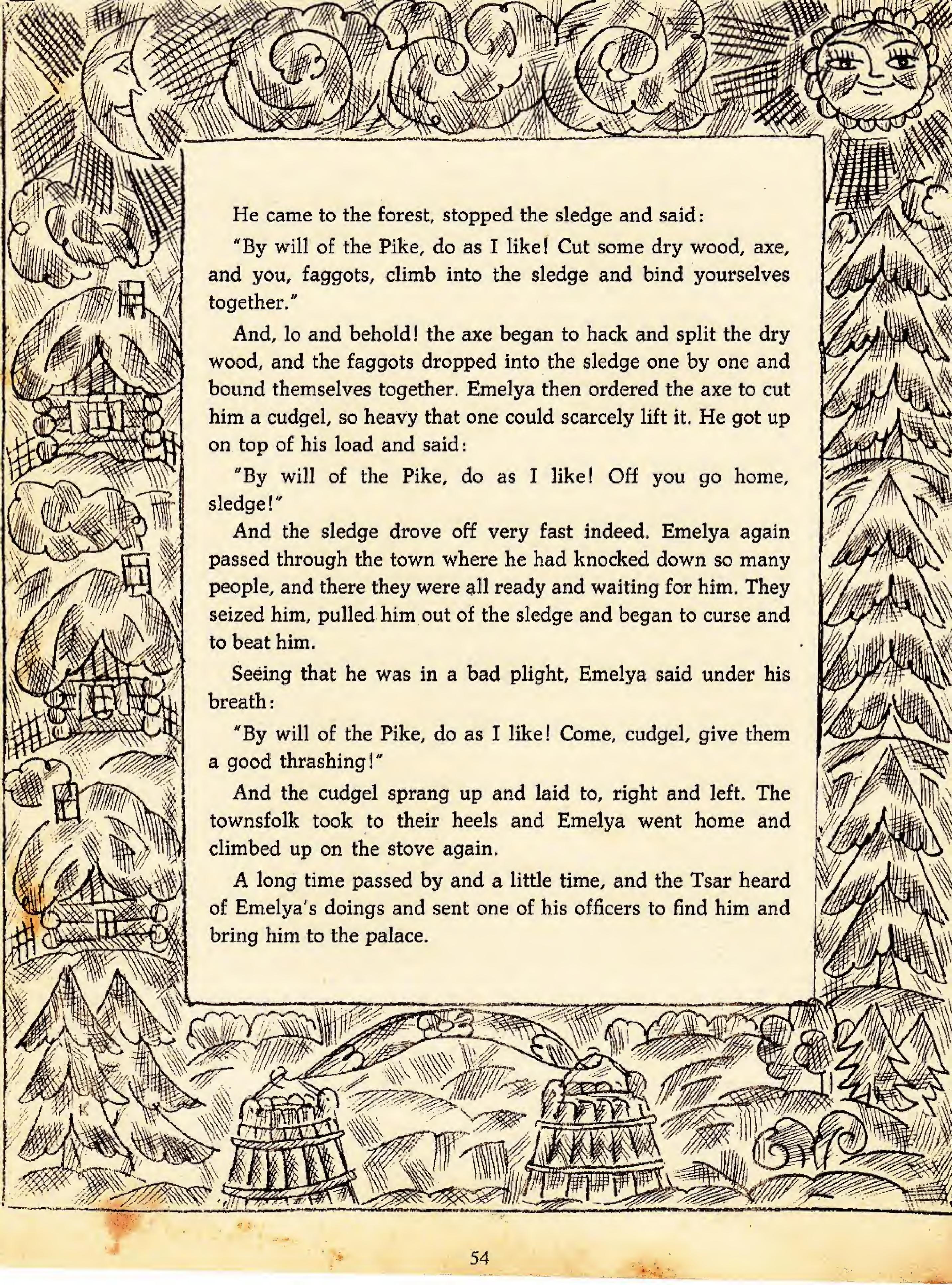
And lo! the axe leapt out from under the bench and into the yard and began to chop the wood, and the logs filed into the hut all by themselves and jumped into the stove.

A long time passed by and a little time, and his sisters-in-law said to Emelya:

"We have no more wood, Emelya. Go to the forest and cut some."

And Emelya, lolling on the stove, replied:  
"And what are you here for?"  
"What do you mean by that, Emelya?" the women said.  
"Surely it's not our business to go to the forest for wood."  
"But I don't much want to do it," Emelya said.  
"Well, then you won't get any presents," they told him.  
There was no help for it, so Emelya climbed down from the stove and put on his boots and *caftan*. He took a length of rope and an axe, came out into the yard and, getting into the sledge, cried:  
"Open the gates, women!"  
And his sisters-in-law said to him:  
"What are you doing in the sledge, fool? You haven't harnessed the horse yet."  
"I can do without the horse," Emelya replied.  
His sisters-in-law opened the gate and Emelya said under his breath:  
"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go the forest, sledge!"  
And, lo and behold! the sledge whizzed out through the gate so quickly that one could scarcely have caught up with it even on horseback.  
Now the way to the forest lay through a town, and the sledge knocked down many people. The townsfolk cried: "Hold him! Catch him!" But Emelya paid no heed and only urged the sledge on to go the faster.





He came to the forest, stopped the sledge and said:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Cut some dry wood, axe, and you, faggots, climb into the sledge and bind yourselves together."

And, lo and behold! the axe began to hack and split the dry wood, and the faggots dropped into the sledge one by one and bound themselves together. Emelya then ordered the axe to cut him a cudgel, so heavy that one could scarcely lift it. He got up on top of his load and said:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go home, sledge!"

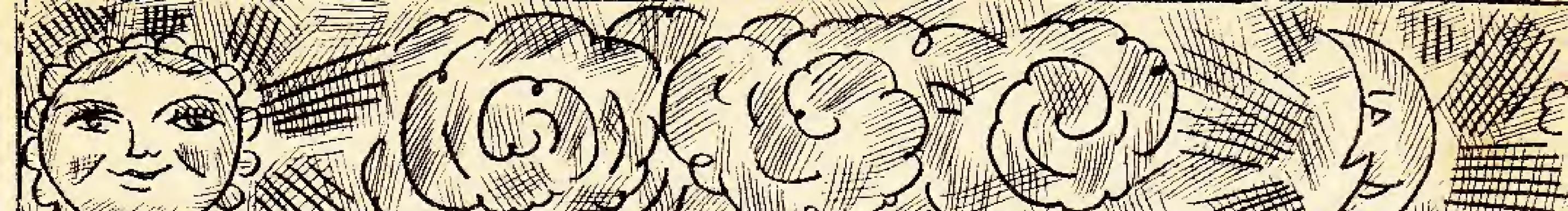
And the sledge drove off very fast indeed. Emelya again passed through the town where he had knocked down so many people, and there they were all ready and waiting for him. They seized him, pulled him out of the sledge and began to curse and to beat him.

Seeing that he was in a bad plight, Emelya said under his breath:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, cudgel, give them a good thrashing!"

And the cudgel sprang up and laid to, right and left. The townsfolk took to their heels and Emelya went home and climbed up on the stove again.

A long time passed by and a little time, and the Tsar heard of Emelya's doings and sent one of his officers to find him and bring him to the palace.



The officer came to Emelya's village, entered his hut and asked him:

"Are you Emelya the Fool?"

And Emelya replied from the stove ledge:

"What if I am?"

"Dress quickly and I shall take you to the Tsar's palace."

"Oh, no. I don't want to go," Emelya said.

The officer flew into a temper and struck Emelya in the face. And Emelya said under his breath:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, cudgel, give him a good thrashing."

And out the cudgel jumped and beat the officer so that it was all he could do to drag himself back to the palace.

The Tsar was much surprised to learn that his officer had not been able to get the better of Emelya and he sent for the greatest of his nobles.

"Find Emelya and bring him to my palace or I'll have your head chopped off," he said.

The great noble bought a store of raisins and prunes and honey cakes, and then he came to the selfsame village and into the selfsame hut and he asked Emelya's sisters-in-law what it was Emelya liked best.

"Emelya likes to be spoken to kindly," they said. "He will do anything you want if only you are gentle with him and promise him a red *caftan* for a present."

The great noble then gave Emelya the raisins, prunes and honey cakes he had brought, and said:

"Please, Emelya, why do you lie on the stove ledge? Come with me to the Tsar's palace."

"I'm well enough where I am," Emelya replied.

"Ah, Emelya, the Tsar will feast you on sweetmeats and wines. Do let us go to the palace."

"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya replied.

"But, Emelya, the Tsar will give you a fine red *caftan* for a present and a cap and a pair of boots."

Emelya thought for a while and then he said:

"Very well, then, I shall come. Only you must go on alone and I shall follow by and by."

The noble rode away and Emelya lay on the stove a while longer and then said:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go to the Tsar's palace, stove!"

And lo! the corners of the hut began to crack, the roof swayed, a wall crashed down and the stove whipped off all by itself into the street and down the road and made straight for the Tsar's palace.

The Tsar looked out of the window and marvelled.

"What is that?" he asked.

And the great noble replied:

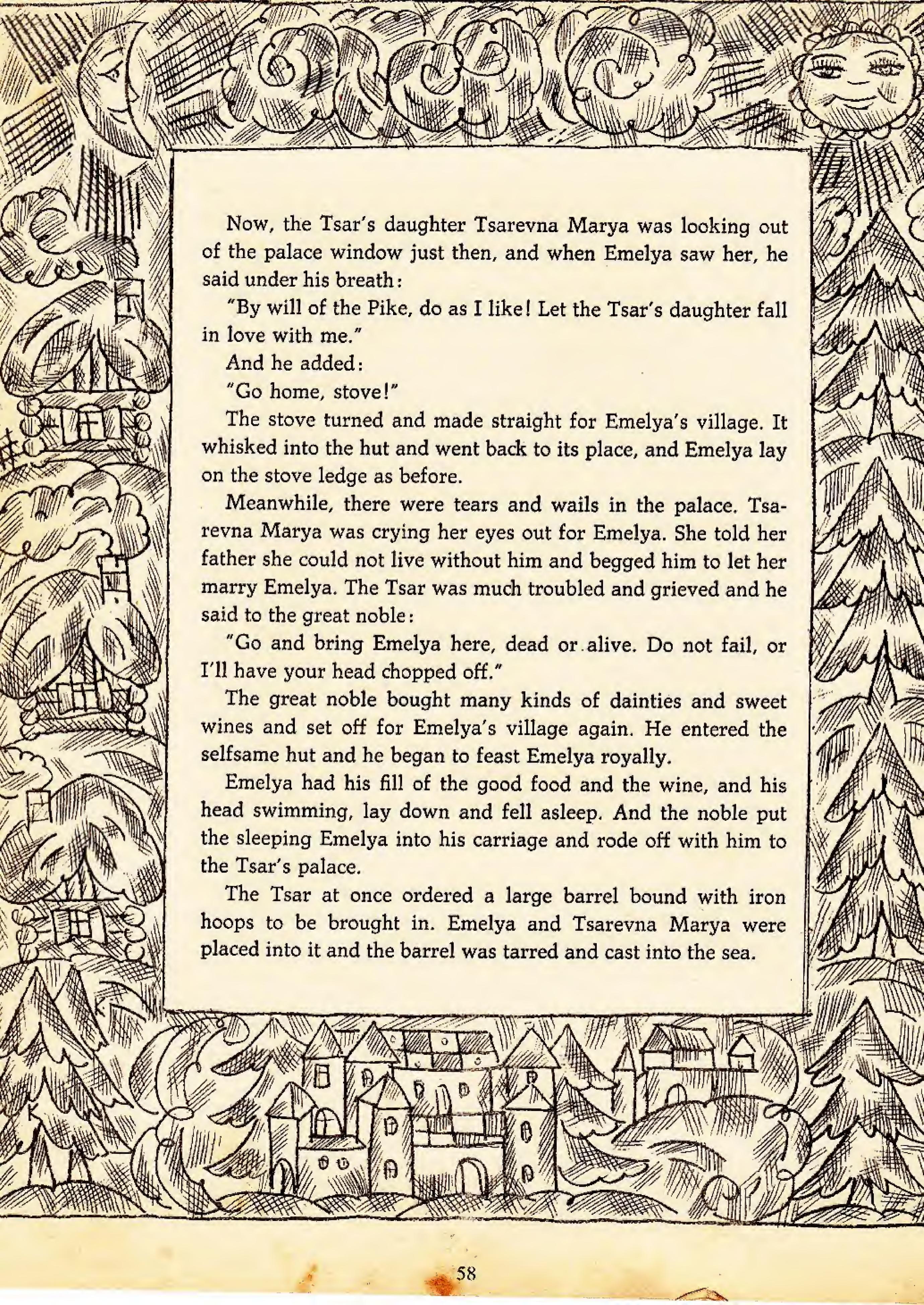
"That is Emelya riding on his stove to your palace."

The Tsar stepped out on his porch and said:

"I have had many complaints about you, Emelya. It seems you have knocked down many people."

"Why did they get in the way of my sledge?" said Emelya.





Now, the Tsar's daughter Tsarevna Marya was looking out of the palace window just then, and when Emelya saw her, he said under his breath:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Let the Tsar's daughter fall in love with me."

And he added:

"Go home, stove!"

The stove turned and made straight for Emelya's village. It whisked into the hut and went back to its place, and Emelya lay on the stove ledge as before.

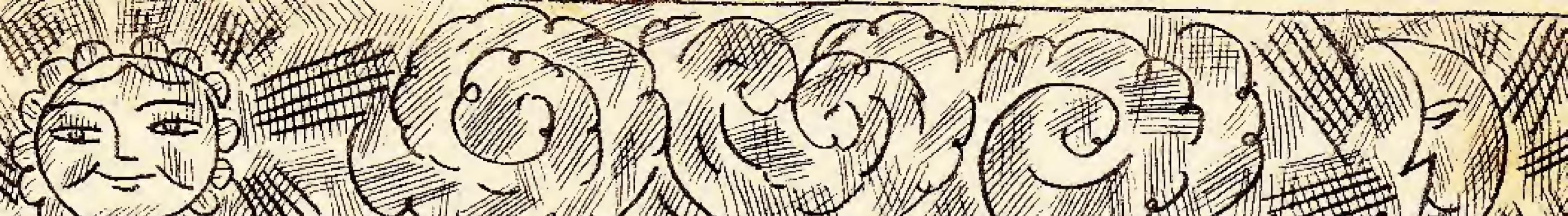
Meanwhile, there were tears and wails in the palace. Tsarevna Marya was crying her eyes out for Emelya. She told her father she could not live without him and begged him to let her marry Emelya. The Tsar was much troubled and grieved and he said to the great noble:

"Go and bring Emelya here, dead or alive. Do not fail, or I'll have your head chopped off."

The great noble bought many kinds of dainties and sweet wines and set off for Emelya's village again. He entered the selfsame hut and he began to feast Emelya royally.

Emelya had his fill of the good food and the wine, and his head swimming, lay down and fell asleep. And the noble put the sleeping Emelya into his carriage and rode off with him to the Tsar's palace.

The Tsar at once ordered a large barrel bound with iron hoops to be brought in. Emelya and Tsarevna Marya were placed into it and the barrel was tarred and cast into the sea.



A long time passed by and a little time, and Emelya awoke. Finding himself in darkness and closely confined, he said:

"Where am I?"

And Tsarevna Marya replied:

"Sad and dreary is our lot, Emelya my love! They have put us in a tarred barrel and cast us into the blue sea."

"And who are you?" Emelya asked.

"I am Tsarevna Marya."

Said Emelya:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, o wild winds, cast the barrel on to the dry shore and let it rest on the yellow sand!"

And, lo and behold! the wild winds began to blow, the sea became troubled and the barrel was cast on to the dry shore and it came to rest on the yellow sand. Out stepped Emelya and Tsarevna Marya, and Tsarevna Marya said:

"Where are we going to live, Emelya my love? Do build us a hut of some kind."

"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya replied.

But she begged and begged and at last he said:

"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Let a palace of stone with a roof of gold be built!"

And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than a stone palace with a roof of gold rose up before them. Round it there spread a green garden, where flowers bloomed and birds sang. Tsarevna Marya and Emelya came into the palace and sat down by the window.

Said Tsarevna Marya:

"Oh, Emelya, couldn't you become a little more handsome?"  
And Emelya did not think long before he said:  
"By will of the Pike, do as I like! Change me into a tall and  
handsome man."

And lo! Emelya turned into a youth as fair as the sky at dawn,  
the handsomest youth that ever was born.

Now about that time the Tsar went hunting and he saw  
a palace where one had never been seen before.

"What dolt has dared to build a palace on my ground?"  
he asked, and he sent his messengers to learn who the culprit  
was.

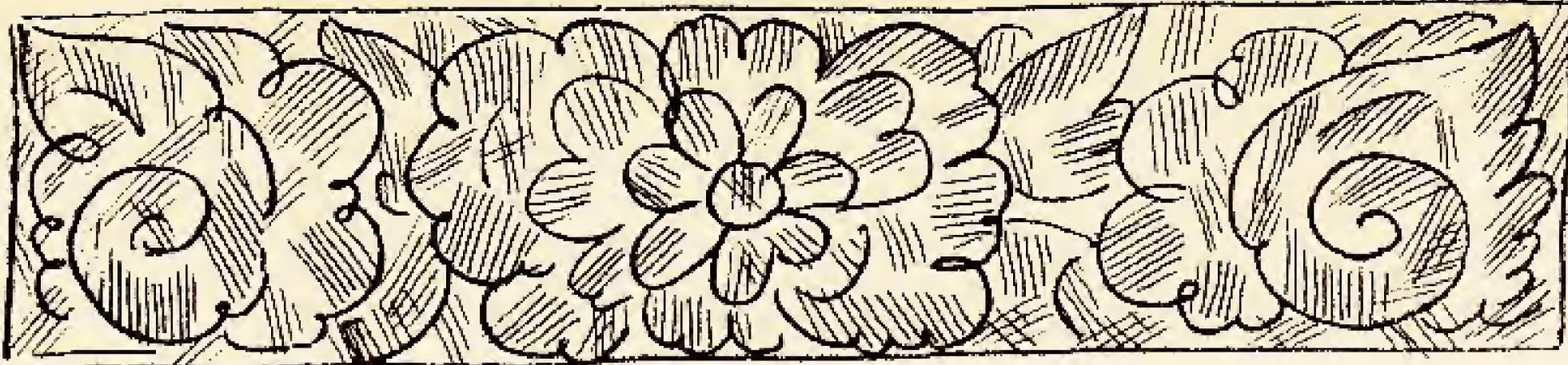
The Tsar's messengers ran to the palace, stood under the  
window and called to Emelya, asking him to tell them who  
he was.

"Tell the Tsar to come and visit me, and he shall hear from  
my lips who I am," Emelya replied.

The Tsar did as Emelya bade, and Emelya met him at  
the palace gate, led him into the palace, seated him at his  
table and feasted him royally. The Tsar ate and drank and  
marvelled.

"Who are you, my good fellow?" he asked at last.  
"Do you remember Emelya the Fool who came to visit you  
on top of a stove?" Emelya said. "Do you remember how you  
had him put in a tarred barrel together with your daughter  
Tsarevna Marya and cast into the sea? Well, I am that same  
Emelya. If I choose, I can set fire to your whole tsardom and  
level it with the ground."



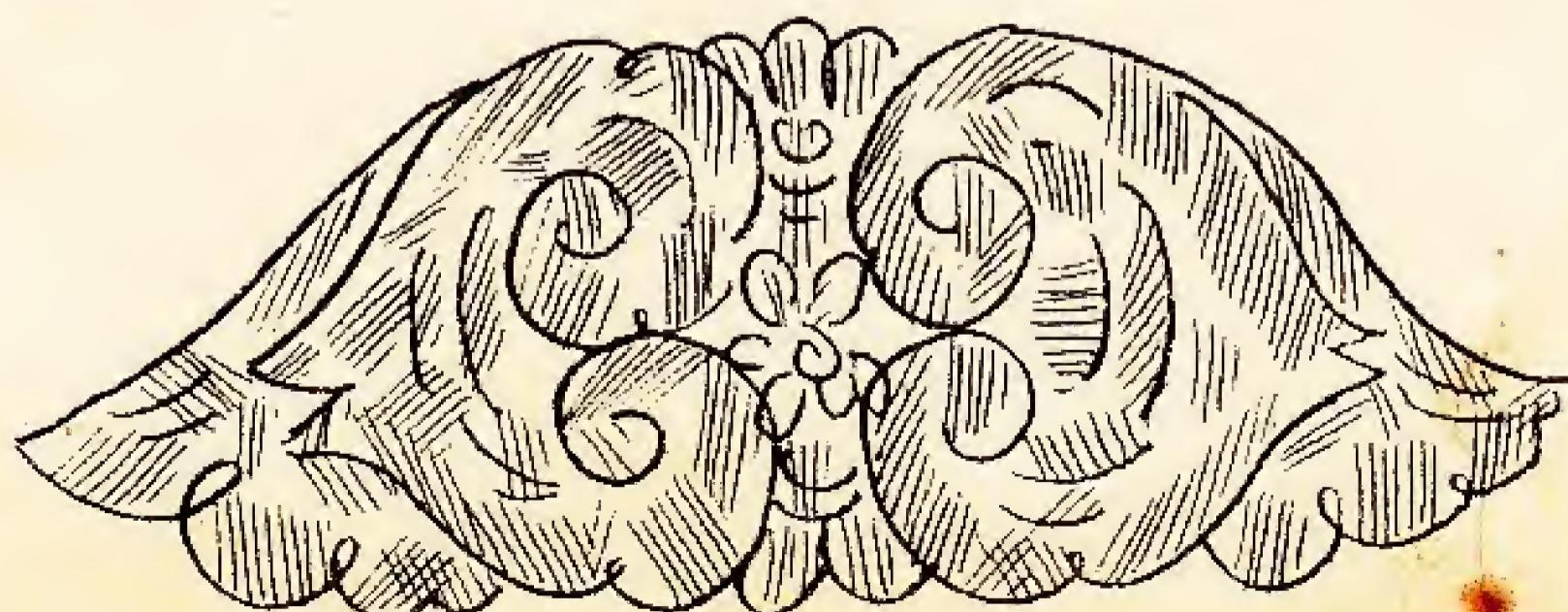


The Tsar was very frightened and he begged Emelya to forgive him.

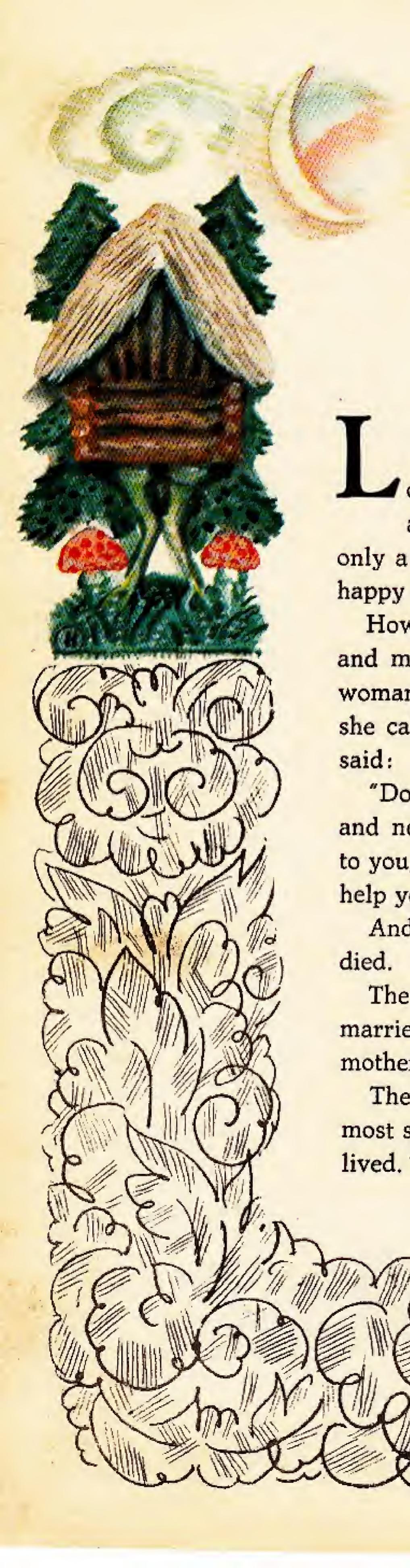
"You can have my daughter in marriage and you can have my tsardom, too, only spare me, Emelya," said he.

Then such a grand feast was held as the world had never seen. Emelya married Tsarevna Marya and began to rule the realm and they both lived happily ever after.

And that is my faithful tale's end, while he who listened is my own true friend.



VASILISA  
THE BEAUTIFUL



**L**ong, long ago, in a certain tsardom there lived an old man and an old woman and their daughter Vasilisa. They had only a small hut for a home, but their life was a peaceful and happy one.

However, even the brightest of skies may become overcast, and misfortune stepped over their threshold at last. The old woman fell gravely ill and, feeling that her end was near, she called Vasilisa to her bedside, gave her a little doll, and said:

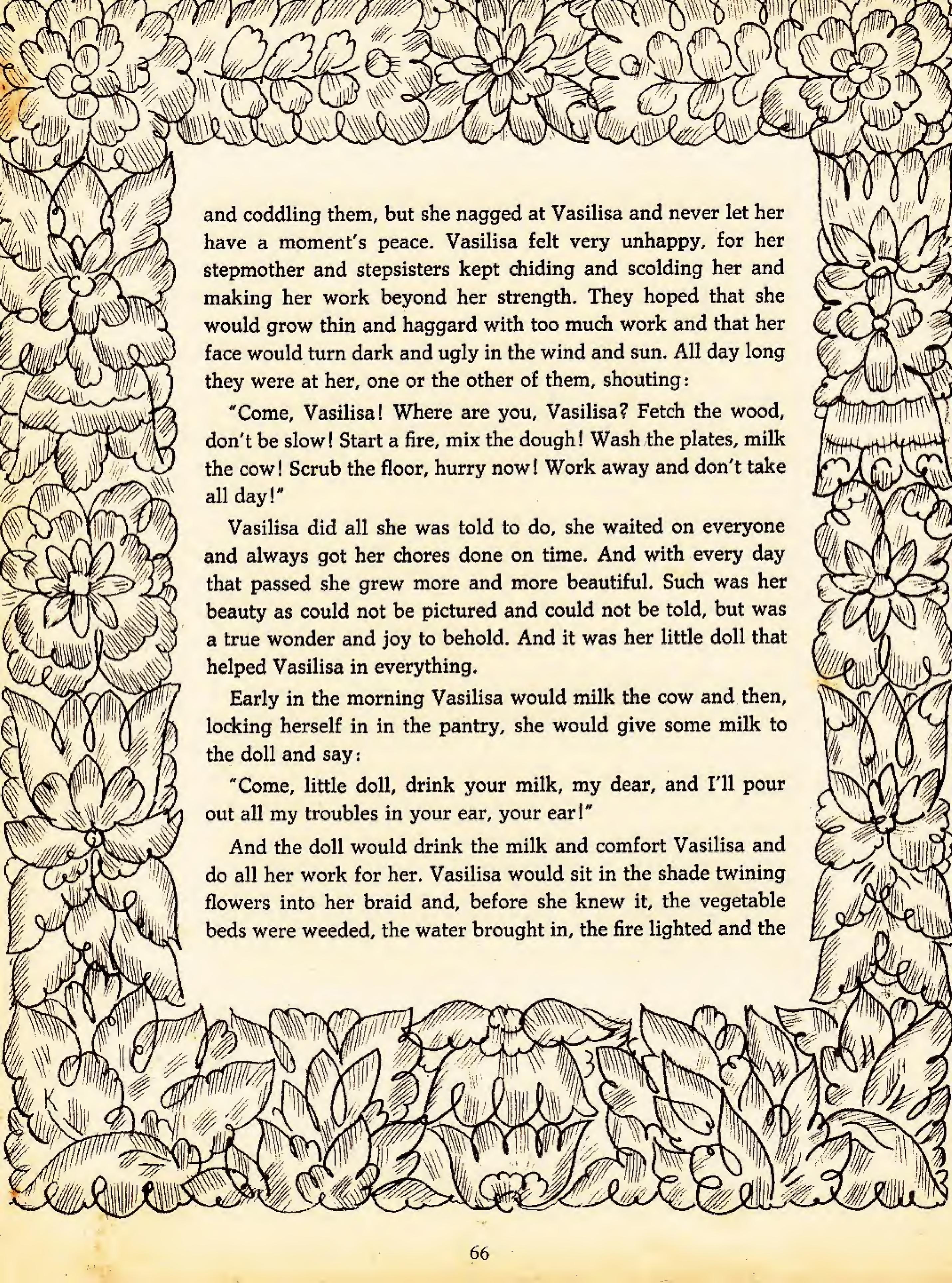
"Do as I tell you, my child. Take good care of this little doll and never show it to anyone. If ever anything bad happens to you, give the doll something to eat and ask its advice. It will help you out in all your troubles."

And, giving Vasilisa a last, parting kiss, the old woman died.

The old man sorrowed and grieved for a time, and then he married again. He had thought to give Vasilisa a second mother, but he gave her a cruel stepmother instead.

The stepmother had two daughters of her own, two of the most spiteful, mean and hard to please young women that ever lived. The stepmother loved them dearly and was always kissing





and coddling them, but she nagged at Vasilisa and never let her have a moment's peace. Vasilisa felt very unhappy, for her stepmother and stepsisters kept chiding and scolding her and making her work beyond her strength. They hoped that she would grow thin and haggard with too much work and that her face would turn dark and ugly in the wind and sun. All day long they were at her, one or the other of them, shouting:

"Come, Vasilisa! Where are you, Vasilisa? Fetch the wood, don't be slow! Start a fire, mix the dough! Wash the plates, milk the cow! Scrub the floor, hurry now! Work away and don't take all day!"

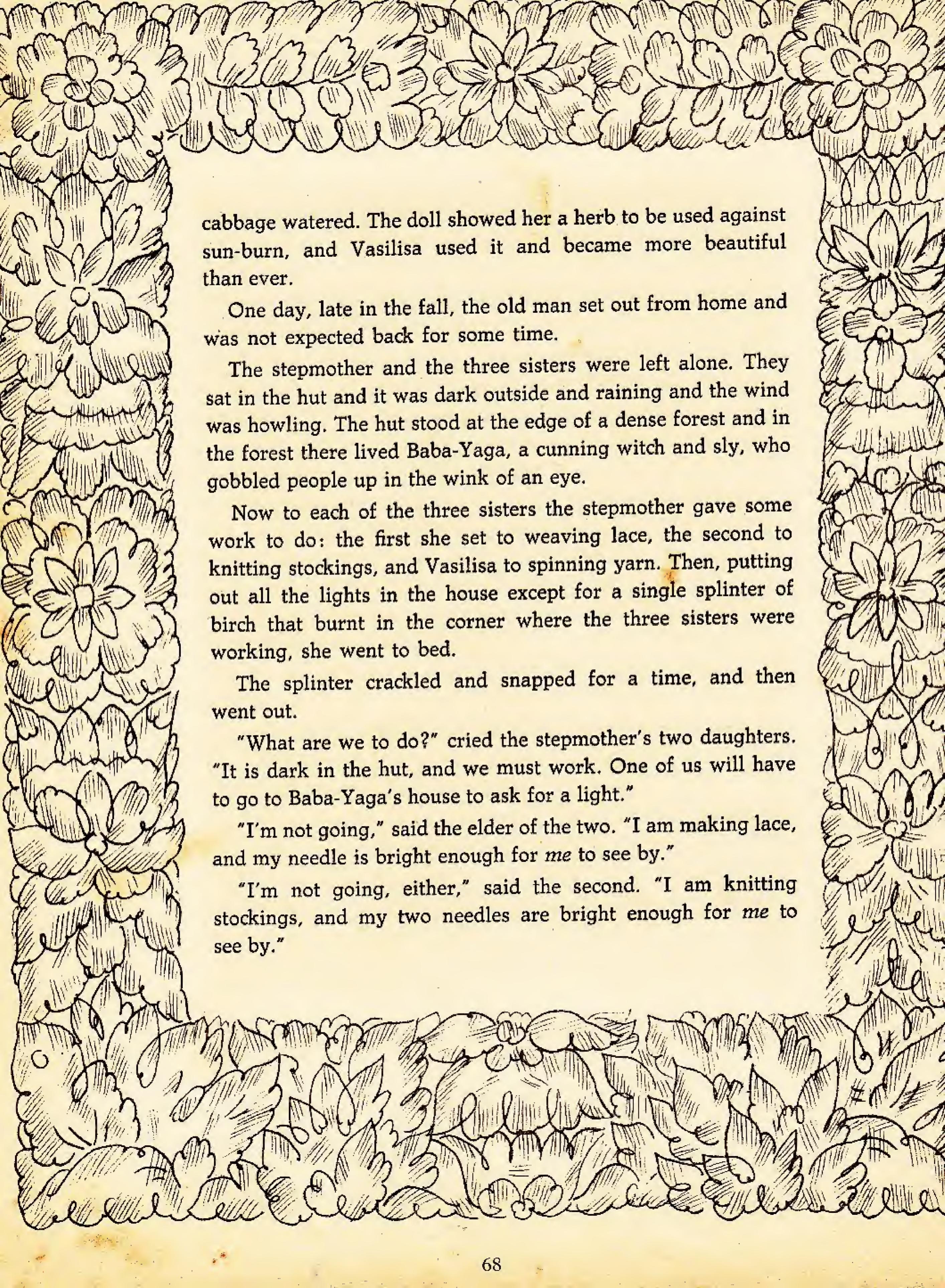
Vasilisa did all she was told to do, she waited on everyone and always got her chores done on time. And with every day that passed she grew more and more beautiful. Such was her beauty as could not be pictured and could not be told, but was a true wonder and joy to behold. And it was her little doll that helped Vasilisa in everything.

Early in the morning Vasilisa would milk the cow and then, locking herself in in the pantry, she would give some milk to the doll and say:

"Come, little doll, drink your milk, my dear, and I'll pour out all my troubles in your ear, your ear!"

And the doll would drink the milk and comfort Vasilisa and do all her work for her. Vasilisa would sit in the shade twining flowers into her braid and, before she knew it, the vegetable beds were weeded, the water brought in, the fire lighted and the





cabbage watered. The doll showed her a herb to be used against sun-burn, and Vasilisa used it and became more beautiful than ever.

One day, late in the fall, the old man set out from home and was not expected back for some time.

The stepmother and the three sisters were left alone. They sat in the hut and it was dark outside and raining and the wind was howling. The hut stood at the edge of a dense forest and in the forest there lived Baba-Yaga, a cunning witch and sly, who gobbled people up in the wink of an eye.

Now to each of the three sisters the stepmother gave some work to do: the first she set to weaving lace, the second to knitting stockings, and Vasilisa to spinning yarn. Then, putting out all the lights in the house except for a single splinter of birch that burnt in the corner where the three sisters were working, she went to bed.

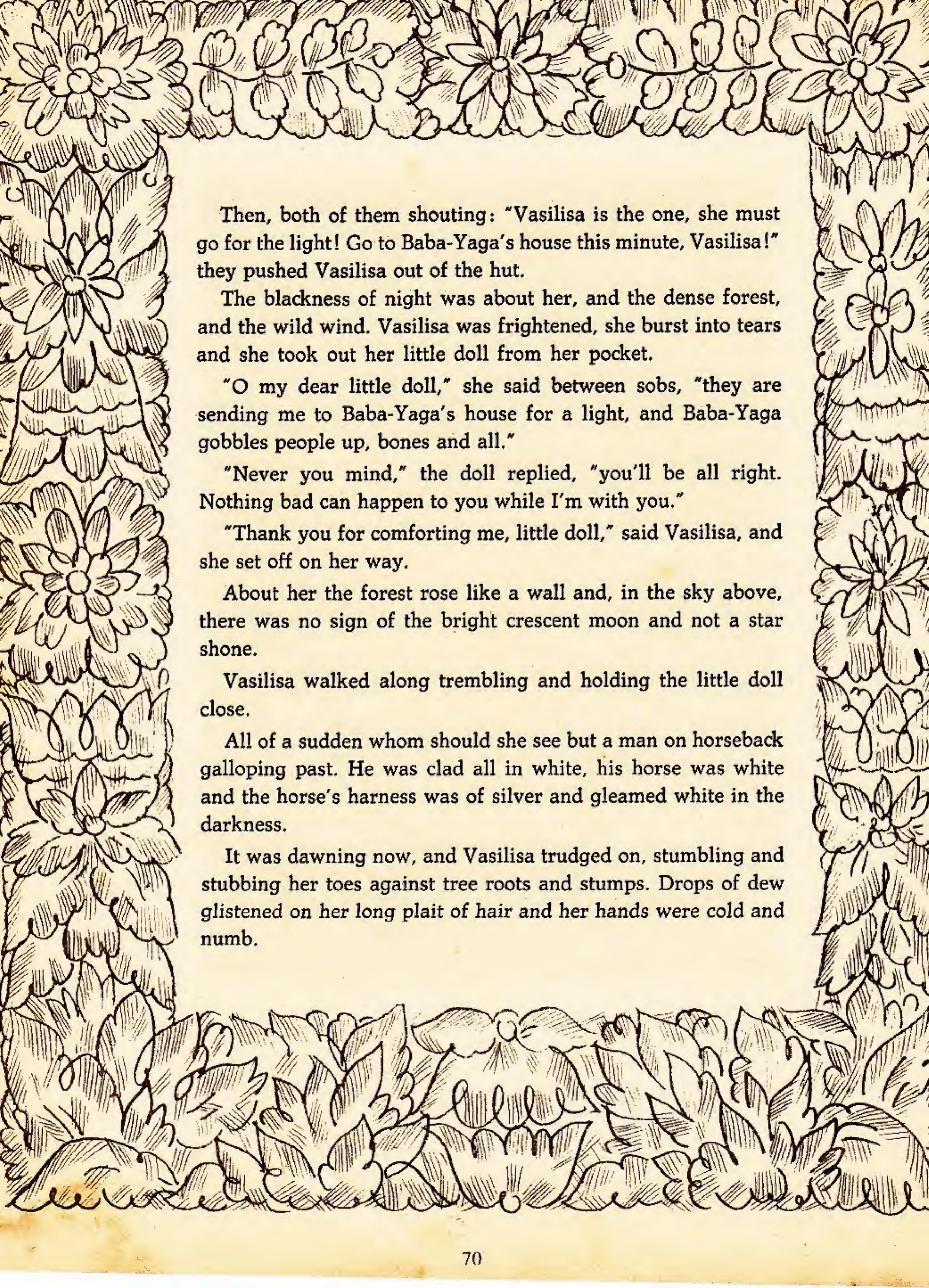
The splinter crackled and snapped for a time, and then went out.

"What are we to do?" cried the stepmother's two daughters. "It is dark in the hut, and we must work. One of us will have to go to Baba-Yaga's house to ask for a light."

"I'm not going," said the elder of the two. "I am making lace, and my needle is bright enough for *me* to see by."

"I'm not going, either," said the second. "I am knitting stockings, and my two needles are bright enough for *me* to see by."





Then, both of them shouting: "Vasilisa is the one, she must go for the light! Go to Baba-Yaga's house this minute, Vasilisa!" they pushed Vasilisa out of the hut.

The blackness of night was about her, and the dense forest, and the wild wind. Vasilisa was frightened, she burst into tears and she took out her little doll from her pocket.

"O my dear little doll," she said between sobs, "they are sending me to Baba-Yaga's house for a light, and Baba-Yaga gobbles people up, bones and all."

"Never you mind," the doll replied, "you'll be all right. Nothing bad can happen to you while I'm with you."

"Thank you for comforting me, little doll," said Vasilisa, and she set off on her way.

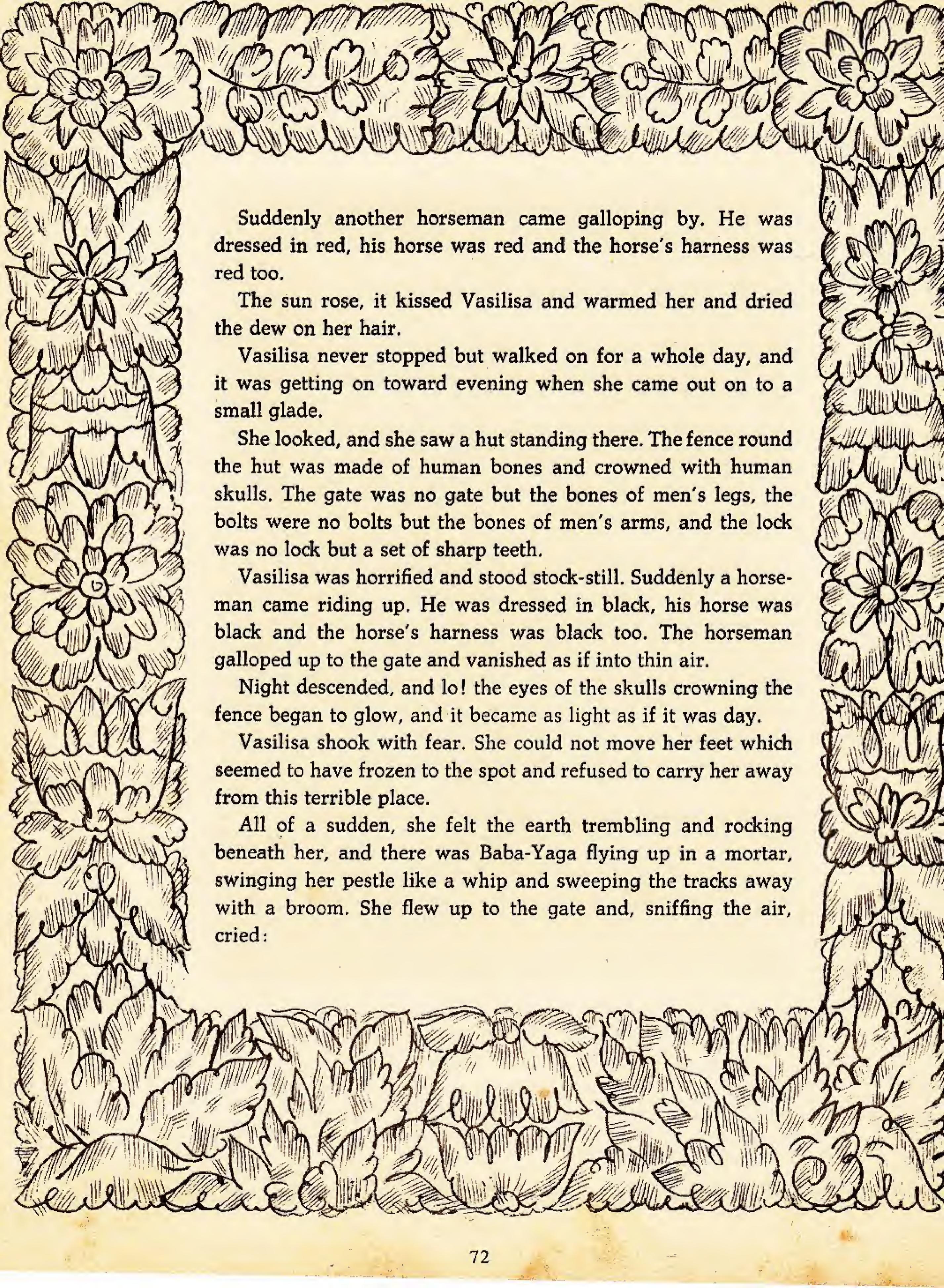
About her the forest rose like a wall and, in the sky above, there was no sign of the bright crescent moon and not a star shone.

Vasilisa walked along trembling and holding the little doll close.

All of a sudden whom should she see but a man on horseback galloping past. He was clad all in white, his horse was white and the horse's harness was of silver and gleamed white in the darkness.

It was dawning now, and Vasilisa trudged on, stumbling and stubbing her toes against tree roots and stumps. Drops of dew glistened on her long plait of hair and her hands were cold and numb.





Suddenly another horseman came galloping by. He was dressed in red, his horse was red and the horse's harness was red too.

The sun rose, it kissed Vasilisa and warmed her and dried the dew on her hair.

Vasilisa never stopped but walked on for a whole day, and it was getting on toward evening when she came out on to a small glade.

She looked, and she saw a hut standing there. The fence round the hut was made of human bones and crowned with human skulls. The gate was no gate but the bones of men's legs, the bolts were no bolts but the bones of men's arms, and the lock was no lock but a set of sharp teeth.

Vasilisa was horrified and stood stock-still. Suddenly a horseman came riding up. He was dressed in black, his horse was black and the horse's harness was black too. The horseman galloped up to the gate and vanished as if into thin air.

Night descended, and lo! the eyes of the skulls crowning the fence began to glow, and it became as light as if it was day.

Vasilisa shook with fear. She could not move her feet which seemed to have frozen to the spot and refused to carry her away from this terrible place.

All of a sudden, she felt the earth trembling and rocking beneath her, and there was Baba-Yaga flying up in a mortar, swinging her pestle like a whip and sweeping the tracks away with a broom. She flew up to the gate and, sniffing the air, cried:



"I smell Russian flesh! Who is here?"

Vasilisa came up to Baba-Yaga, bowed low to her and said very humbly:

"It is I, Vasilisa, Grandma. My stepsisters sent me to you to ask for a light."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Baba-Yaga replied. "Your stepmother is a kinswoman of mine. Very well, then, stay with me for a while and work, and then we'll see what is to be seen."

And she shouted at the top of her voice:

"Come unlocked, my bolts so strong! Open up, my gate so wide!"

The gate swung open, Baba-Yaga rode in in her mortar and Vasilisa walked in behind her.

Now at the gate there grew a birch-tree and it made as if to lash Vasilisa with its branches.

"Do not touch the maid, birch-tree, it was I who brought her," said Baba-Yaga.

They came to the house, and at the door there lay a dog and it made as if to bite Vasilisa.

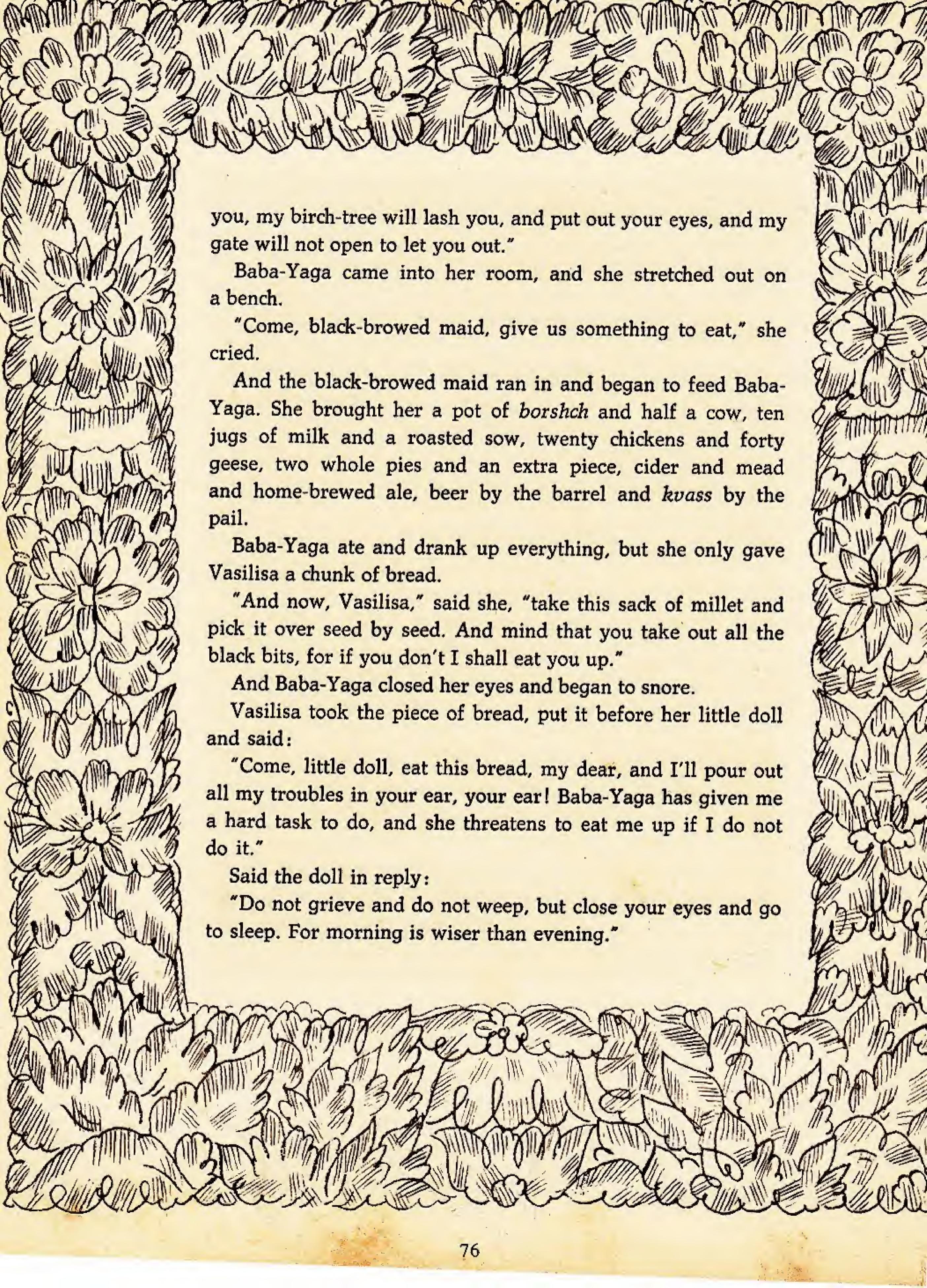
"Do not touch the maid, it was I who brought her," said Baba-Yaga.

They came inside and in the passage an old grumbler-rumbler of a cat met them and made as if to scratch Vasilisa.

"Do not touch the maid, you old grumbler-rumbler of a cat, it was I who brought her," said Baba-Yaga.

"You see, Vasilisa," she added, turning to her, "it is not easy to run away from me. My cat will scratch you, my dog will bite





you, my birch-tree will lash you, and put out your eyes, and my gate will not open to let you out."

Baba-Yaga came into her room, and she stretched out on a bench.

"Come, black-browed maid, give us something to eat," she cried.

And the black-browed maid ran in and began to feed Baba-Yaga. She brought her a pot of *borshch* and half a cow, ten jugs of milk and a roasted sow, twenty chickens and forty geese, two whole pies and an extra piece, cider and mead and home-brewed ale, beer by the barrel and *kvass* by the pail.

Baba-Yaga ate and drank up everything, but she only gave Vasilisa a chunk of bread.

"And now, Vasilisa," said she, "take this sack of millet and pick it over seed by seed. And mind that you take out all the black bits, for if you don't I shall eat you up."

And Baba-Yaga closed her eyes and began to snore.

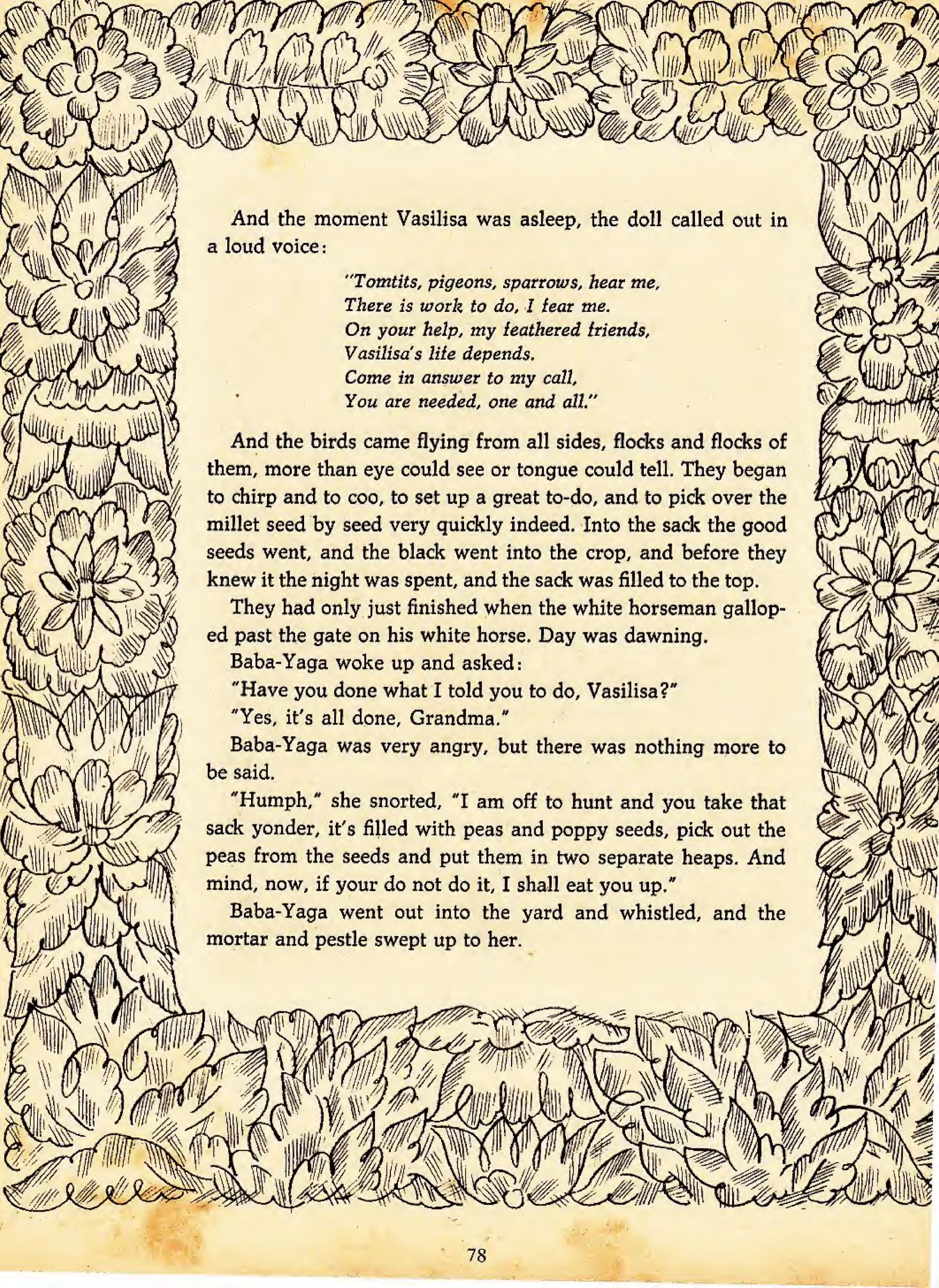
Vasilisa took the piece of bread, put it before her little doll and said:

"Come, little doll, eat this bread, my dear, and I'll pour out all my troubles in your ear, your ear! Baba-Yaga has given me a hard task to do, and she threatens to eat me up if I do not do it."

Said the doll in reply:

"Do not grieve and do not weep, but close your eyes and go to sleep. For morning is wiser than evening."





And the moment Vasilisa was asleep, the doll called out in a loud voice:

*"Tomtits, pigeons, sparrows, hear me,  
There is work to do, I fear me.  
On your help, my feathered friends,  
Vasilisa's life depends.  
Come in answer to my call,  
You are needed, one and all."*

And the birds came flying from all sides, flocks and flocks of them, more than eye could see or tongue could tell. They began to chirp and to coo, to set up a great to-do, and to pick over the millet seed by seed very quickly indeed. Into the sack the good seeds went, and the black went into the crop, and before they knew it the night was spent, and the sack was filled to the top.

They had only just finished when the white horseman galloped past the gate on his white horse. Day was dawning.

Baba-Yaga woke up and asked:

"Have you done what I told you to do, Vasilisa?"

"Yes, it's all done, Grandma."

Baba-Yaga was very angry, but there was nothing more to be said.

"Humph," she snorted, "I am off to hunt and you take that sack yonder, it's filled with peas and poppy seeds, pick out the peas from the seeds and put them in two separate heaps. And mind, now, if you do not do it, I shall eat you up."

Baba-Yaga went out into the yard and whistled, and the mortar and pestle swept up to her.

The red horseman galloped past, and the sun rose.

Baba-Yaga got into the mortar and rode out of the yard, swinging her pestle like a whip and whisking the tracks away with a broom.

Vasilisa took a crust of bread, fed her little doll and said:

"Do take pity on me, little doll, my dear, and help me out."

And the doll called out in ringing tones:

"Come to me, o mice of the house, the barn and the field, for there is work to be done!"

And the mice came running, swarms and swarms of them, more than eye could see or tongue could tell, and before the hour was up the work was all done.

It was getting on toward evening, and the black-browed maid set the table and began to wait for Baba-Yaga's return.

The black horseman galloped past the gate, night fell, and the eyes of the skulls crowning the fence began to glow. And now the trees groaned and crackled, the leaves rustled, and Baba-Yaga, the cunning witch and sly, who gobbled people up in the wink of an eye came riding home.

"Have you done what I told you to do, Vasilisa?" she asked.

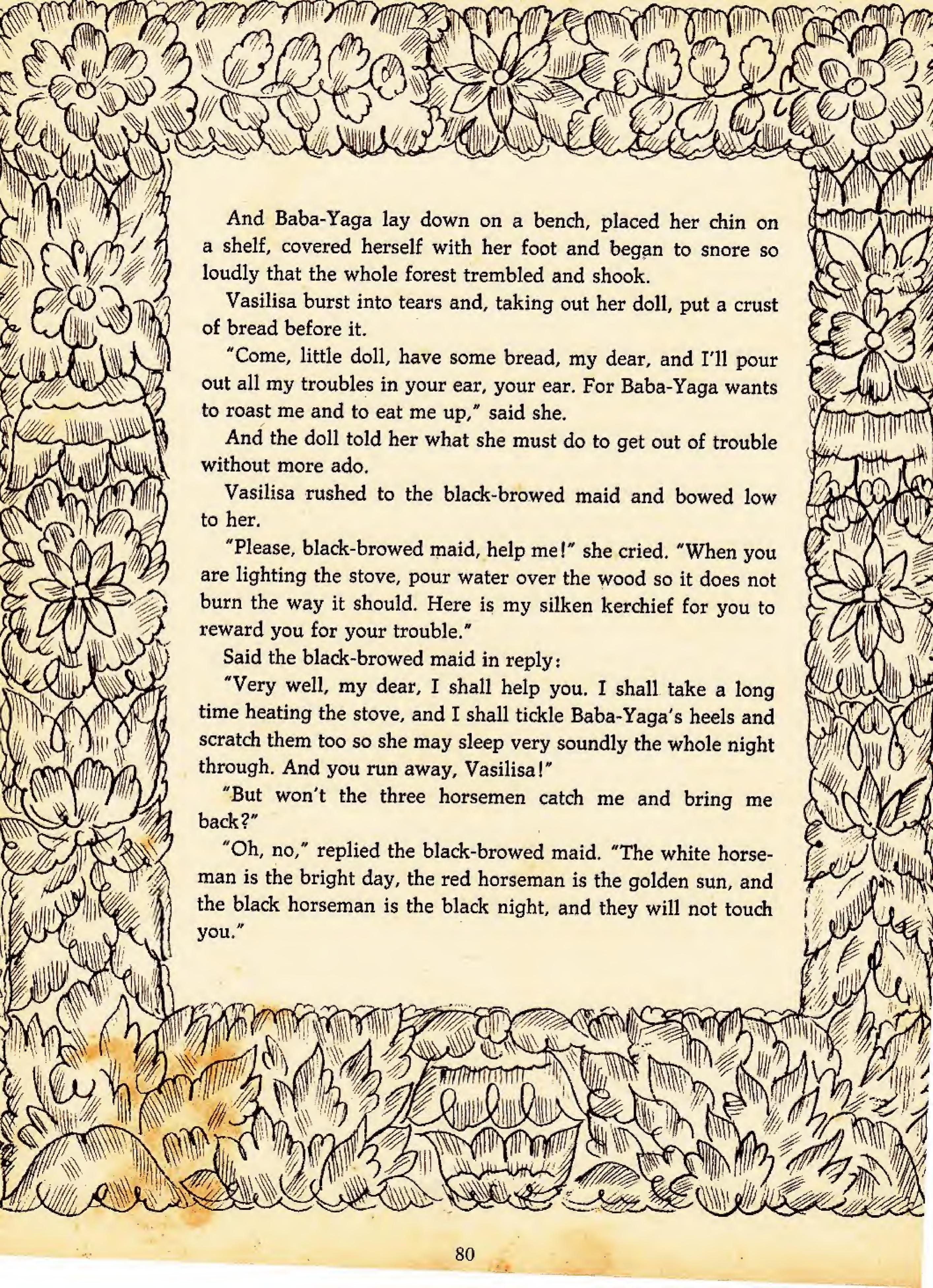
"Yes, it's all done, Grandma."

Baba-Yaga was very angry, but what could she say!

"Well, then, go to bed, I am going to turn in myself in a minute."

Vasilisa went behind the stove, and she heard Baba-Yaga say:

"Light the stove, black-browed maid, and make the fire hot. When I wake up, I shall roast Vasilisa."



And Baba-Yaga lay down on a bench, placed her chin on a shelf, covered herself with her foot and began to snore so loudly that the whole forest trembled and shook.

Vasilisa burst into tears and, taking out her doll, put a crust of bread before it.

"Come, little doll, have some bread, my dear, and I'll pour out all my troubles in your ear, your ear. For Baba-Yaga wants to roast me and to eat me up," said she.

And the doll told her what she must do to get out of trouble without more ado.

Vasilisa rushed to the black-browed maid and bowed low to her.

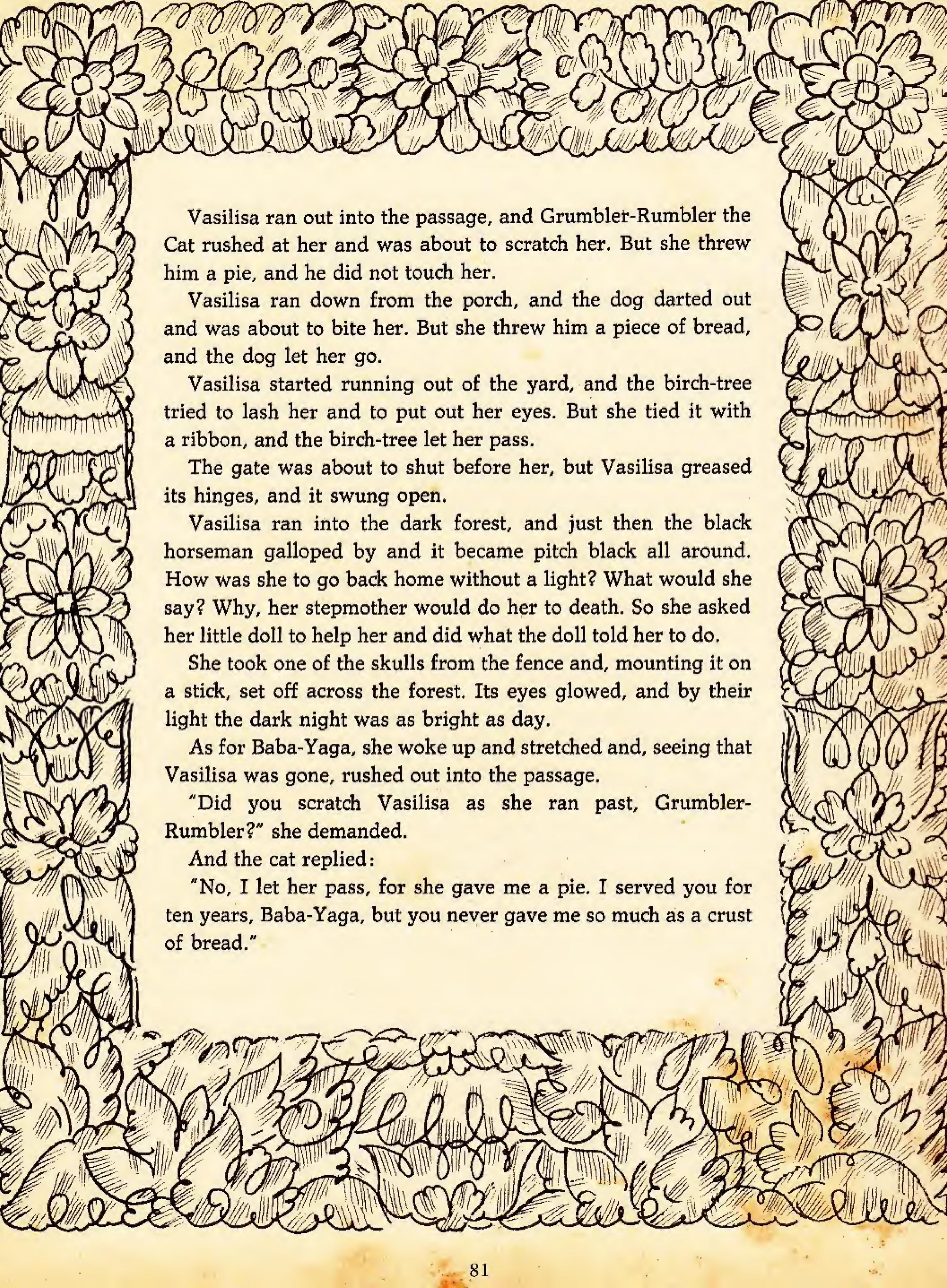
"Please, black-browed maid, help me!" she cried. "When you are lighting the stove, pour water over the wood so it does not burn the way it should. Here is my silken kerchief for you to reward you for your trouble."

Said the black-browed maid in reply:

"Very well, my dear, I shall help you. I shall take a long time heating the stove, and I shall tickle Baba-Yaga's heels and scratch them too so she may sleep very soundly the whole night through. And you run away, Vasilisa!"

"But won't the three horsemen catch me and bring me back?"

"Oh, no," replied the black-browed maid. "The white horseman is the bright day, the red horseman is the golden sun, and the black horseman is the black night, and they will not touch you."



Vasilisa ran out into the passage, and Grumblet-Rumbler the Cat rushed at her and was about to scratch her. But she threw him a pie, and he did not touch her.

Vasilisa ran down from the porch, and the dog darted out and was about to bite her. But she threw him a piece of bread, and the dog let her go.

Vasilisa started running out of the yard, and the birch-tree tried to lash her and to put out her eyes. But she tied it with a ribbon, and the birch-tree let her pass.

The gate was about to shut before her, but Vasilisa greased its hinges, and it swung open.

Vasilisa ran into the dark forest, and just then the black horseman galloped by and it became pitch black all around. How was she to go back home without a light? What would she say? Why, her stepmother would do her to death. So she asked her little doll to help her and did what the doll told her to do.

She took one of the skulls from the fence and, mounting it on a stick, set off across the forest. Its eyes glowed, and by their light the dark night was as bright as day.

As for Baba-Yaga, she woke up and stretched and, seeing that Vasilisa was gone, rushed out into the passage.

"Did you scratch Vasilisa as she ran past, Grumblet-Rumbler?" she demanded.

And the cat replied:

"No, I let her pass, for she gave me a pie. I served you for ten years, Baba-Yaga, but you never gave me so much as a crust of bread."

Baba-Yaga rushed out into the yard.

"Did you bite Vasilisa, my faithful dog?" she demanded.

Said the dog in reply:

"No, I let her pass, for she gave me some bread. I served you for ever so many years, but you never gave me so much as a bone."

"Birch-tree, birch-tree!" Baba-Yaga roared. "Did you put out Vasilisa's eyes for her?"

Said the birch-tree in reply:

"No, I let her pass, for she bound my branches with a ribbon. I have been growing here for ten years, and you never even tied them with a string."

Baba-Yaga ran to the gate.

"Gate, gate!" she cried. "Did you shut before her that Vasilisa might not pass?"

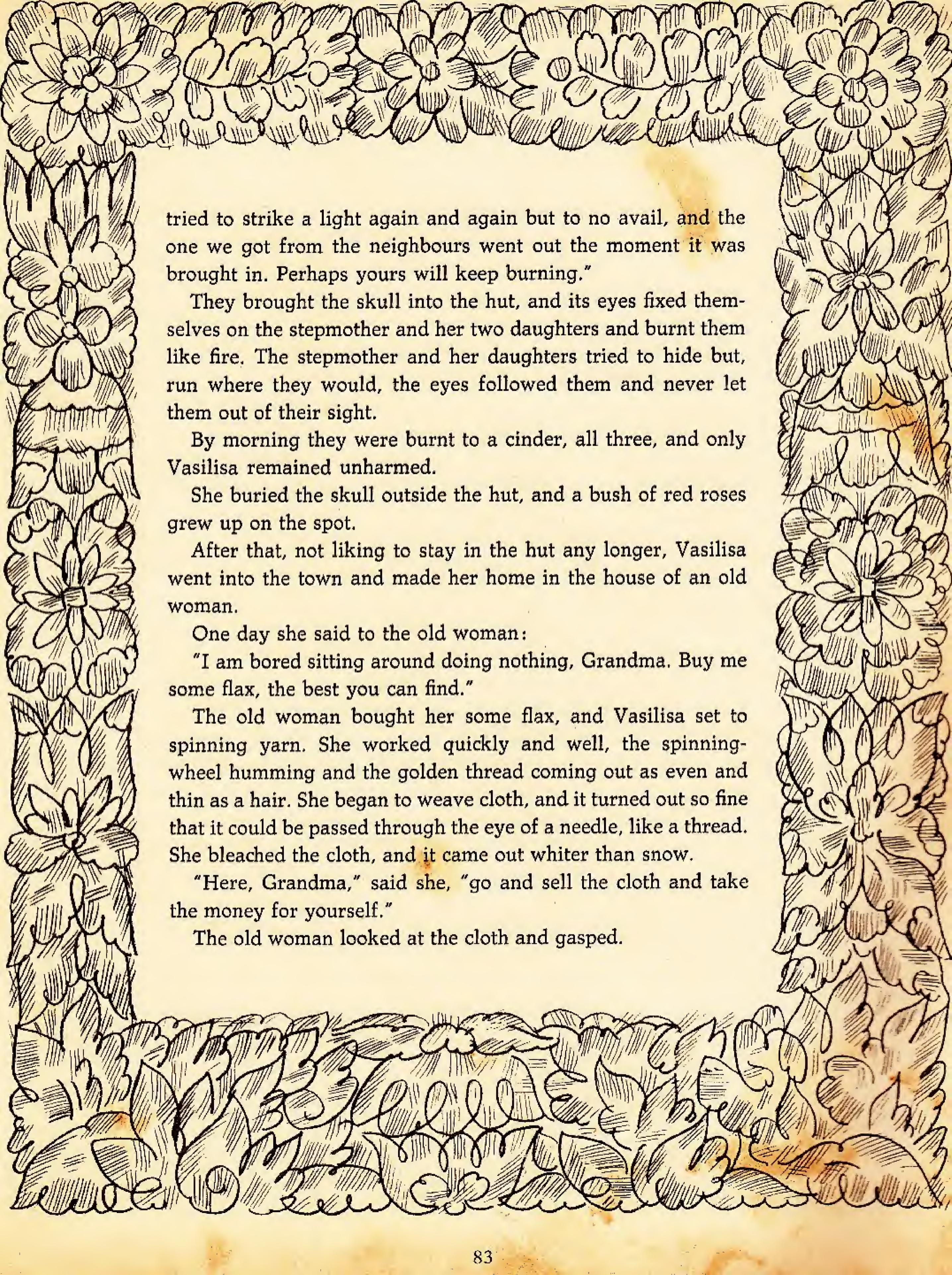
Said the gate in reply:

"No, I let her pass, for she greased my hinges. I served you for ever so long, but you never even put water on them."

Baba-Yaga flew into a temper. She began to beat the dog and thrash the cat, to break down the gate and to chop down the birch-tree, and she was so tired by then that she forgot all about Vasilisa.

Vasilisa ran home, and she saw that there was no light on in the house. Her stepsisters rushed out and began to chide and scold her.

"What took you so long fetching the light?" they demanded.  
"We cannot seem to keep one on in the house at all. We have



tried to strike a light again and again but to no avail, and the one we got from the neighbours went out the moment it was brought in. Perhaps yours will keep burning."

They brought the skull into the hut, and its eyes fixed themselves on the stepmother and her two daughters and burnt them like fire. The stepmother and her daughters tried to hide but, run where they would, the eyes followed them and never let them out of their sight.

By morning they were burnt to a cinder, all three, and only Vasilisa remained unharmed.

She buried the skull outside the hut, and a bush of red roses grew up on the spot.

After that, not liking to stay in the hut any longer, Vasilisa went into the town and made her home in the house of an old woman.

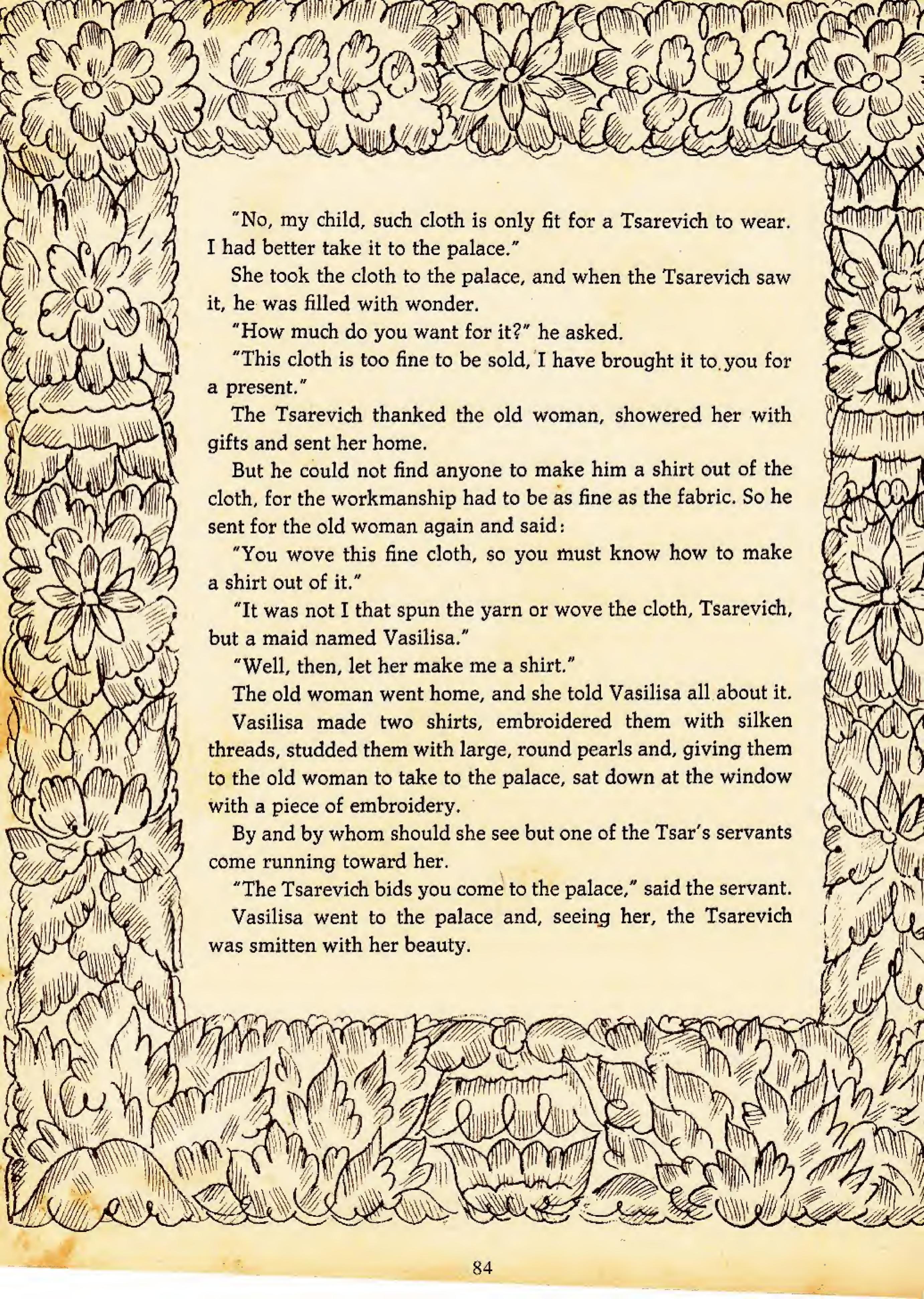
One day she said to the old woman:

"I am bored sitting around doing nothing, Grandma. Buy me some flax, the best you can find."

The old woman bought her some flax, and Vasilisa set to spinning yarn. She worked quickly and well, the spinning-wheel humming and the golden thread coming out as even and thin as a hair. She began to weave cloth, and it turned out so fine that it could be passed through the eye of a needle, like a thread. She bleached the cloth, and it came out whiter than snow.

"Here, Grandma," said she, "go and sell the cloth and take the money for yourself."

The old woman looked at the cloth and gasped.



"No, my child, such cloth is only fit for a Tsarevich to wear. I had better take it to the palace."

She took the cloth to the palace, and when the Tsarevich saw it, he was filled with wonder.

"How much do you want for it?" he asked.

"This cloth is too fine to be sold, I have brought it to you for a present."

The Tsarevich thanked the old woman, showered her with gifts and sent her home.

But he could not find anyone to make him a shirt out of the cloth, for the workmanship had to be as fine as the fabric. So he sent for the old woman again and said:

"You wove this fine cloth, so you must know how to make a shirt out of it."

"It was not I that spun the yarn or wove the cloth, Tsarevich, but a maid named Vasilisa."

"Well, then, let her make me a shirt."

The old woman went home, and she told Vasilisa all about it.

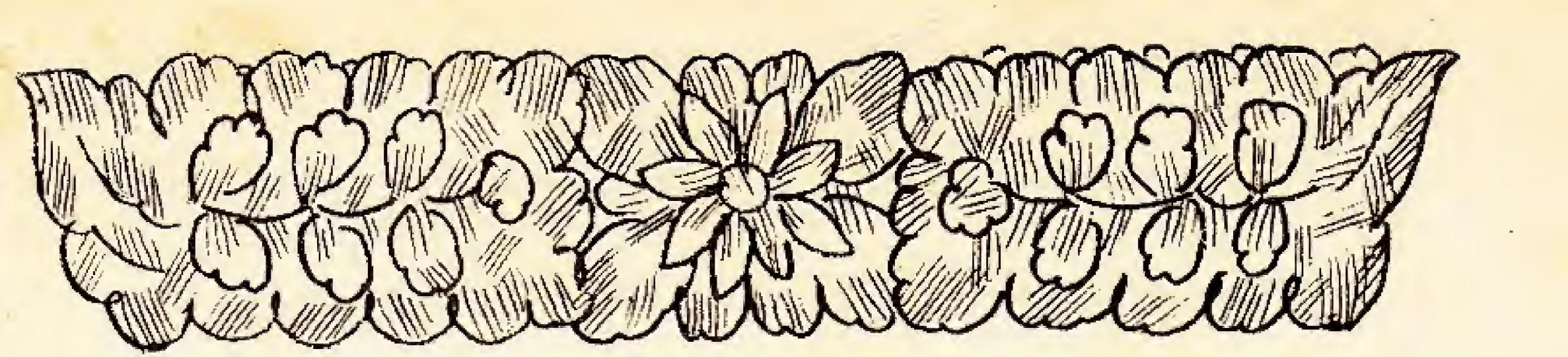
Vasilisa made two shirts, embroidered them with silken threads, studded them with large, round pearls and, giving them to the old woman to take to the palace, sat down at the window with a piece of embroidery.

By and by whom should she see but one of the Tsar's servants come running toward her.

"The Tsarevich bids you come to the palace," said the servant.

Vasilisa went to the palace and, seeing her, the Tsarevich was smitten with her beauty.





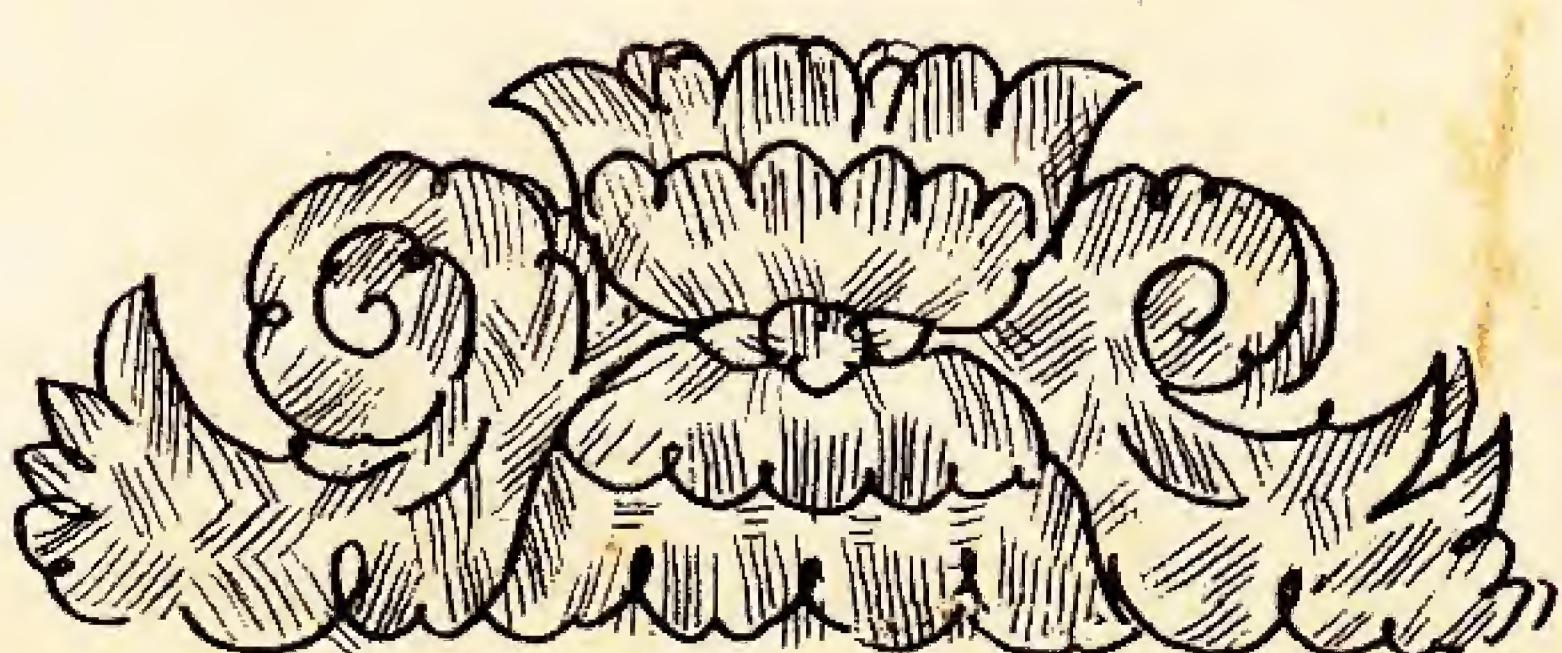
"I cannot bear to let you go away again, you shall be my wife," said he.

He took both her milk-white hands in his and he placed her in the seat beside his own.

And so Vasilisa and the Tsarevich were married, and, when Vasilisa's father returned soon afterwards, he made his home in the palace with them.

Vasilisa took the old woman to live with her too, and, as for her little doll, she always carried it about with her in her pocket.

And thus did they live for many a day and wait for us all to come for a stay.

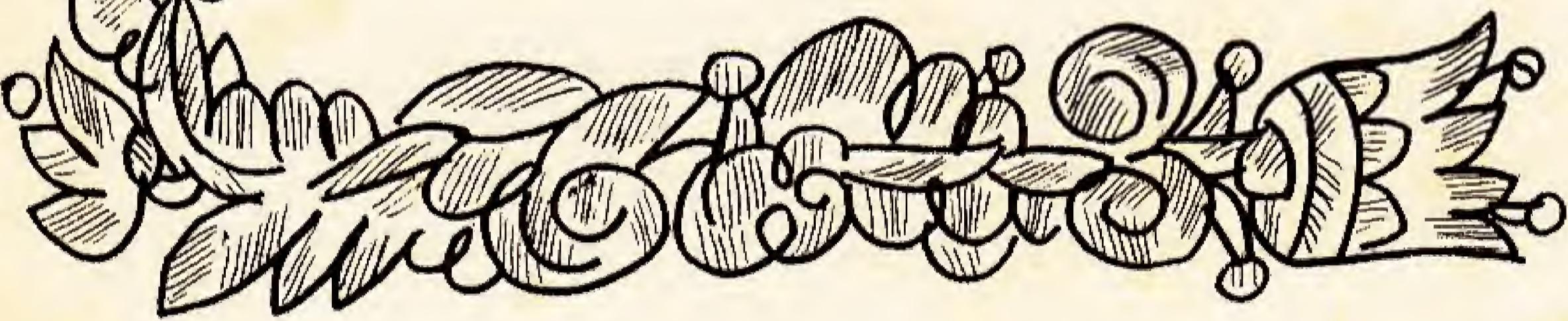




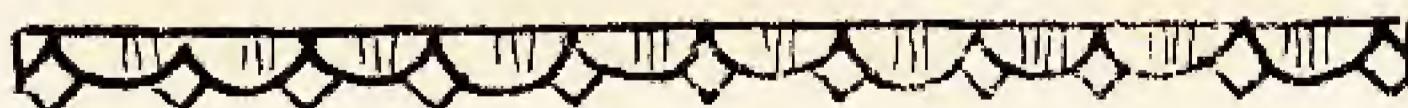


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ЖАР-ПТИЦА  
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